

# **CULTURAL EDUCATION (CUL102)**

**Resource Material**

**SEMESTER TWO**

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**|| Aum amriteswaryai namah ||**



“Our true nature is like the sky, not the clouds. It is like the ocean, not the waves. Clouds and waves come and go, but the sky and the ocean remain as the substratum of their existence. God is not someone who sits somewhere above the sky. His abode is within us. It is this understanding that we have to develop ... When your eyes have the power to penetrate beyond the surface of existence, then your life will be full of joy. One Truth shines through all of creation; rivers and mountains, plants and animals, the sun, the moon and all the stars, you and I all are expressions of this one Reality. When you behold everything as God, your whole life becomes an act of worship, a form of prayer, a song of praise. Spirituality and life are not two separate things; they are one. Transcending the cycle of death and rebirth is the real purpose of this life in human form. Spirituality teaches us how to live in the world. The one word solution for almost all the problems the world is facing today is compassion. Love is the face of God. Lending a helping hand to a neglected soul, feeding the hungry, giving the sad and dejected a compassionate smile – this is the language of love. May the tree of our life be firmly rooted in the soil of love. Let good deeds be the leaves on the tree. May words of kindness form its flowers and may peace be its fruits.”

**-AMMA**

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# Chapter 1

## To the World from India

The glorious culture of India found expression not only in philosophy and spirituality, but also in achievements in all areas of science and technology, art, music and dance. The knowledge did not remain limited to India alone, but were transmitted around the globe. These discoveries are not just a matter of pride for Indians alone. They represent the triumph of the human mind and hence are a matter of pride for the human species irrespective of nationality.

Ancient India has given to the world many elements of knowledge in fields like physics, chemistry, logic, astronomy, mathematics, production technology, mechanical engineering, shipbuilding, navigation, architecture, civil engineering, medical science and so on.

### Ancient India's Contribution to Astronomy



Astronomy is one area which has fascinated all mankind from the beginnings of history. In India the first references to astronomy are to be found in the Rig Veda. In ancient times personalities like Aryabhata and Varahamihira were associated with Indian astronomy.

In Indian languages, the science of Astronomy is today called Khagola-shastra. The word Khagola perhaps is derived from the famous astronomical observatory at the University of Nalanda which was called Khagola. The Nalanda University once housed 9 million books. It was the center of education for scholars from all over Asia. Many Greek, Persian and Chinese students studied here. The university was burnt down by pillaging invaders who overran India in the 11th century. It was at Nalanda University that the famous 5th century Indian astronomer Aryabhata resided.

Aryabhata made significant contributions to the fields of astronomy and mathematics. He wrote a text on his discoveries called 'Aryabhattiya'. The topics include definitions of various units of time, models of planetary motion, planetary longitude corrections for different terrestrial locations. He applied plane trigonometry to spherical geometry by projecting points and lines on the surface of a sphere onto appropriate planes. Topics include prediction of solar and lunar eclipses and an explicit statement that the apparent westward motion of the stars is due to the spherical Earth's rotation about its axis. Aryabhata also correctly ascribed the luminosity of the Moon and planets to reflected sunlight. Considering that Aryabhata discovered these facts 1500 years ago, and 1000 years before Copernicus and Galileo makes him a pioneer in this area too. India's first satellite launched in 1975 was named Aryabhata in his honour.

Indian astronomers also propounded the theory that the earth was a sphere. Aryabhata was the first one to have propounded this theory in the 5th century. Another Indian astronomer, Brahmagupta estimated in the 7th century that the circumference of the earth was 5000 yojanas. A yojana is around 7.2 km. The estimate of 36,000 km as the earth's circumference comes quite close to the actual circumference known today.

There is an old Sanskrit Sloka (couplet) which is as follows: "***Sarva Dishanaam, Suryaha, Suryaha, Suryaha.***" This couplet means that there are suns in all directions. This couplet which describes the night sky as full of suns, indicates that in ancient times Indian astronomers had arrived at the important discovery that the stars visible at night are similar to the Sun visible during day time. In other words, it was recognized that the sun is also a star, though the nearest one. This

understanding is demonstrated in another sloka which says that when one sun sinks below the horizon, a thousand suns take its place.

Many Indian astronomers had formulated ideas about gravity and gravitation. Brahmagupta, in the 7th century had said about gravity that “Bodies fall towards the earth as it is in the nature of the earth to attract bodies, just as it is in the nature of water to flow”. About a hundred years before Brahmagupta, another astronomer, Varahamihira had claimed for the first time perhaps that there should be a force which might be keeping bodies stuck to the earth, and also keeping heavenly bodies in their determined places. Thus the concept of the existence of some attractive force that governs the falling of objects to the earth as also determining the positions which heavenly bodies occupy was recognized.

### **Ancient India's Contribution to Mathematics**

“India was the motherland of our race and Sanskrit the mother of Europe's languages. India was the mother of our philosophy, of much of our mathematics.” - Will Durant, American Historian 1885-1981

“The world owes most to India in the realm of mathematics, which was developed to a stage more advanced than that reached by any other nation of antiquity.” - British historian Arthur Basham

Mathematics represents a high level of abstraction attained by the human mind. In India, mathematics has its roots in Vedic literature which is over 4000 years old. Between 1000 B.C. and 1000 A.D. various treatises on mathematics were authored by Indian mathematicians in which were set forth for the first time, the concept of zero, the techniques of algebra and algorithm, square root and cube root.

The development of algebra originated in India and was termed as Bijaganitam. This technique of computation was discovered more than

1500 years back. An Indian mathematician - astronomer, Bhaskaracharya has also authored a treatise on this subject around the 12th century A.D. titled ‘Siddhanta-Shiromani’ of which one section is entitled Bijaganitam.

From the 13th century onwards, India was subject to invasions from the Arabs and other Islamised communities like the Turks and Afghans. Along with these invaders came chroniclers and critics like Al-Beruni who studied Indian society and polity. The system of mathematics they observed in India was adapted by them and given the name ‘Al-Jabr’. The term ‘algebra’ is a modification of the term ‘Al jabr’.

Even in the area of geometry, Indian mathematicians had their contribution. The Shulba Sutras are sources of knowledge of Indian mathematics from the Vedic period. One of the major Shulba Sutras was composed by Baudhayana. The Baudhayana Shulba sutra gives the construction of geometric shapes such as squares and rectangles. The sutras tell how to calculate the square root of 2. It also gives, sometimes approximate, geometric area-preserving transformations from one geometric shape to another. These include transforming a square into a rectangle, an isosceles trapezium, an isosceles triangle, a rhombus, and a circle, and transforming a circle into a square. The sutras contain discussion and demonstrations of cases of the Pythagorean theorem. So, perhaps this theorem should be called the Baudhayana theorem!

The concept of zero originated in ancient India. This concept may seem to be a very ordinary one. But if one gives a hard thought to this concept it would be seen that zero is not just a numeral. Apart from being a numeral, it is also a fundamental concept. In absence of a concept of zero there could have been only positive numerals in computation, the inclusion of zero in mathematics opened up a new dimension of negative numerals. In ancient India zero was indicated by a dot and was termed Puṣyam also

known as Shubra. The Arabs refer to the zero as Siphra or Sifr from which we have the English terms Cipher or Cypher.

The concept of 'algorithm' came from India. Al Khwarazmi evolved a technique of calculation from Indian sources. This technique which was named by westerners after Al Khwarazmi as "Algorismi" now known as the term 'algorithm' used in computer science. The Arabs borrowed so much from India the field of mathematics that even the subject of mathematics in Arabic came to known as 'Hindsa' which means 'from India'. Much of this knowledge went to Europe through the Arabs.

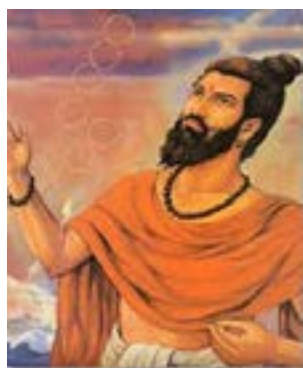
The ancient India astronomer Brahmagupta, in his 'Brahmasphuta-Siddhanta' formulated the rules of the operation zero, enabling the decimal system of computation. With the integration of zero into the numerals it became possible to note higher numerals with limited numerals. All numbers can be denoted with only ten numerals which is not possible in Roman numerals. The decimal system of computation is significantly faster and easier compared to computation using Roman numerals. Brahmagupta also arrived at solutions for indeterminate equations and thus can be called the founder of higher branch of mathematics called numerical analysis. Brahmagupta's treatise 'Brahmasphuta-Siddhanta' was translated into Arabic under the title 'Sind Hind'.

Aryabhata names the first 10 decimal places and gives algorithms for obtaining square and cubic roots, utilizing the decimal number system. Then he treats geometric measurements—employing  $62,832/20,000$  ( $= 3.1416$ ) for  $\pi$ —and develops properties of similar right-angled triangles and of two intersecting circles. He also constructing a table of sines. Mathematical series, quadratic equations, compound interest, ration and proportions, and the solution of various linear equations are among the arithmetic and algebraic topics included. Aryabhata's general solution

for linear indeterminate equations consisted of breaking the problem down into new problems with successively smaller coefficients—essentially what is known as the Euclidean algorithm.

### Ancient India's Contribution to Physics

The Indian concept of the atom was developed independently and prior to the development of the idea in Europe. The elementary particle of matter was termed 'anu' or 'parmanu'. The first Indian philosopher who formulated ideas about the atom in a systematic manner was Kanada who lived in the 6th century B.C.



Kanada is very important in the history of Indian science due to the path-breaking conception of atom. He propounded the Vaisheshika-Sutra on the atomic theory of matter. On reading these Sutras we find that Kanada's atomic

theory was far more advanced than formulated later by the Greek philosophers, Democritus and Leucippus. In the words of Arthur Basham, the noted historian, these ideas of Indian physicists "were brilliant imaginative explanations of the physical structure of the world, and in a large measure, agreed with the discoveries of modern physics."

### Ancient India's Contribution to Chemistry

Parallel to the development of the concepts of atom and atomic permutations and combinations in physics there also was a similar development of ideas in the area of Chemistry. However given the nature of chemistry, the ideas did not remain confined to an abstract level, Indian ideas about chemistry grew by experimentation. The areas of application of the principles of chemistry were: the smelting of metals, the distillation of perfumes and fragrant ointments, the making of dyes and pigments, the extraction of sugar, etc.

In ancient India, chemistry was called Rasayana Shastra, Rasa-Vidya, Rasatantra and Rasakriya all of which roughly mean 'Science of liquids'. There also existed chemical laboratories which were called Rasakriya-nagaram and Rasakriya-shala. A chemist was referred to as a Rasatantravid. Another word, Dravya was also used to refer to chemicals. In ancient India, chemistry was evidently developed to a significant level.

### **Ancient India's Contribution to Metallurgy**

Metallurgy was an important activity the world over. In fact the discovery of smelting of metals made possible the progress of society from the Stone Age to the Bronze and Iron Ages. In the area of smelting metals, Indians had acquired proficiency in the extraction of metals from ore, and also in the casting of metals. The Iron Pillar at Delhi is one such instance. This Pillar is estimated to have been cast in the Gupta period i.e. about 1500 years ago. The Pillar is 7.32 meters in length, tapering from a diameter of 40 cm at the base to 30 cm, at the top and it weighs about 6 tons. It has been standing in open for more than a millennium in the heat, dust and rain, but except for the natural erosion it has not caught rust. This kind of a rust-proof iron had not been smelted anywhere else in the world.

Another instance of Indian metallurgy is the copper statue of Gautama Buddha found in Bihar. The statue is 2.13 meters high and weighs nearly a ton. The beautiful statues of Nataraja bear testimony to the excellence in smelting metals achieved in India in ancient times.



The ironsmiths who had cast the iron pillar and the statue of Buddha must not only have been

experts at their job but they must have inherited the technique that had been perfected over many generations. The Iron Pillar itself testifies to the fact that Indian metallurgy and chemistry had reached a high stage of perfection more than 1500 years ago. Nagarjuna was one such practitioner of the technique of combining various metals in order to invent a superior metal.

Nagarjuna was a chemist who wrote the treatise, Rasaratnakara. The treatise dealt with the preparation of rasa (liquids, mainly mercury). Nagarjuna has discussed various combinations of liquids in this volume. His treatise, the Rasaratnakara also gave a survey of the status of metallurgy as it existed in India in those days.

Methods for the extraction of metals like gold, silver, tin and copper from their ores and their purification were also mentioned, in Rasaratnakara. The process of distillation, liquefaction, sublimation and roasting were also mentioned. Nagarjuna also discussed, in detail, the possibility of transmutation of base metals into gold. But although he could not produce gold, these techniques did yield metals with gold-like yellowish brilliance. Till today these methods are being used to manufacture imitation jewellery.

### **Ancient India's Contribution to Shipbuilding and Naval Engineering**

A book of ship building from Ancient India is named Yukti Kalpa Taru, compiled by Bhoja Narapati. This treatise gives a technocratic exposition on the technique of shipbuilding. It sets forth minute details about the various types of ships, their sizes, the materials from which they were built. The Yukti Kalpa Taru gives sufficient information and date to prove that in ancient times, Indian shipbuilders had a good knowledge of the materials which were used in building ships. It describes the qualities of the different types of wood and their suitability in shipbuilding. The Yukti Kalpa Taru also gives an elaborate classification of ships based on their size. The treatise also gives elaborate directions for

decorating and furnishing the ships with a view to making them comfortable for passengers. Also mentioned are details about the internal seating and accommodation to be provided on the ships. Indians travelled to Cambodia, Java in Sumatra, Borneo, Japan, China, the Malayan Peninsula and Egypt. India cultivated trade relations with the Roman Empire. The largest temple complex in the world is Angkor Wat at Angkor, Cambodia, dedicated to Lord Vishnu built by the King Suryavarman II in the early 12th century. The Maccha Yantra used by Indian navigators nearly 1500 to 2000 years ago is known as the mariner's compass today. Many commodities and manufactured goods were being exported from India.



### **Ancient India's Contribution to Medical Science**

Medical Science was one area where amazing advances had been made in ancient times in India. The practice of surgery has been recorded in India the 8th century B.C. Surgery is one of the eight branches of Ayurveda the ancient Indian system of medicine. The oldest treatise dealing with surgery in the world is the Shushruta-Samahita (Shushruta's compendium). Shushruta, the author of this work, was one of the famous medical practitioners of Ancient India.

Shushruta was one of the first to study the human anatomy. In the Shushruta Samahita he has described in detail the study of anatomy. Shushruta's specialization was rhinoplasty (plastic surgery)

and ophthalmology (ejection of cataracts). Shushruta has described surgery under eight heads Chedya (excision), Lekhya (scarification), Vedhya (puncturing), Esya (exploration), Ahrya (extraction), Vsraya (evacuation) and Sivya (stitching). Plastic surgery, dentistry and operation of cataracts were pioneering advances in the field of medicine made in India.

Ayurveda, the system of medicine developed in India, literally means 'the science of living' (longevity). Ayu means life and Veda means knowledge. The origins of this system of medicine are lost in the hoary past, and the body of knowledge that comes under the heading Ayurveda constitutes ideas about diseases, diagnosis and cure, which have been accumulated over the ages past. According to Charaka, a noted practitioner of Ayurveda in ancient India, "A physician should first study all the factors, including environment, which influence a patient's disease and then prescribe treatment. It is more important to prevent the occurrence of disease than to seek a cure".

These remarks were made by Charaka, some 20 centuries ago in his famous Ayurvedic treatise Charaka Samahita. The treatise contains many more such remarks which are held in reverence even today. Some of them are in the fields of physiology, etiology and embryology. Charaka was the first physician to present the concept of digestion, metabolism and immunity. In Ayurveda there are no such things as instant relievers, pain killers or antibiotics. The herbs used in Ayurvedic remedies do not operate against the body's metabolism, their effect is registered gradually and hence there are minimum side-effects. The constituents of Ayurvedic medicines are largely based on organic matter.

### **Ancient India's Contribution to Architecture and Art**

The Science of Architecture and Civil Construction was known in Ancient India as Sthapatya-Shastra. The word Sthapatya is derived from the root word Sthapana i.e. 'to establish'. The

technique of architecture was both a science and an art, hence it is also known as Sthapatya-kala, the word Kala means an art.

From very early times the construction of temples, palaces, rest houses and other civil construction were undertaken by professional architects known as Sthapati. Even during the Vedic times, there existed professionals who specialized in the technique of constructing chariots and other heavy instruments of war. These professionals have been referred to in the Rig Veda as Rathakara which literally means 'chariot maker'.

The excavations at Mohenjodaro and Harrappa proved the existence of a developed urban civilisation in India. The Indus valley civilization is dated around 3000 B.C. Thus since the last 5000 years, India has had an urban civilisation. The existence of an urban civilization presumes the existence of well developed techniques of architecture and construction.



The majority of the large constructions were temples. The construction of temples rarely used mortar but used a technique where the stones could be affixed to one another with the force of gravity. The exquisite carvings were engraved after the stones had been fixed in their places. Thus the carving of figurines right up to the top of a temple's roof must have been a demanding task. Carvings are especially seen in the Gopurams i.e. roofs over the south Indian temples and on the tall doorways to the temples. The Raja-gopurams or main roofs of such temples rise to a height of nearly 90 to 100 ft. and are fully carved with various figurines depicting gods and goddesses.

Indian techniques of art and architecture spread both westwards and eastwards. During the reign of Ashoka, Afghanistan, Baluchistan and Sistan were parts of the Mauryan Empire. Buddhist Stupas were constructed in these Mauryan provinces. Unfortunately, very few of them have survived till today. However the huge statues of Buddha that were cut out of rock faces covering entire mountain faces and cliffs, have survived natural ravages. (The Buddha statue at Bamiyan in Afghanistan was blown up recently by the Taliban).

In India, art is not seen as something apart from life like ornamentation or entertainment, but an integral part of it. Performing arts bring life to numerous festivals and ceremonies, and reaffirm the faith of the people in their heritage and culture. These facets have been responsible for sustaining the continuity of ancient traditions and strengthening the link between the past and the present. Under the patronage of rulers, skilled artisans and entertainers were encouraged to specialize and to refine their skills to greater levels of perfection and sophistication. Gradually, the classical forms of art evolved for the glory of temple and palace, reaching their zenith across India. Through the ages, rival kings competed with each other to attract the most renowned artists and performers to their courts.

The diverse and rich history of India is reflected in the various crafts that have been flourishing in the country. The art treasures of India are among the greatest in the world. The roots of the Indian painting can be traced back to the days of the Indus Valley civilization and it reflects the keen sense of painting among the people then. The paintings of the Ajanta and Ellora caves exhibit the creative genius of the artists of that period. Considering tough weather conditions, these paintings have, surprisingly, survived for such a long period of time.

The architectural wonders include temples carved into solid rock, and huge temples with enormous sculptured towers, such as Meenakshi Temple in

Madurai, Tamil Nadu. Mahabalipuram in Tamil Nadu has a number of cave temples, monolith carvings on rocks done between 7th and 8th century. The Sun Temple at Konark is a testimony to architectural mastery in 13th century. The number of architectural marvels spread across the length and breadth of India are too numerous to enumerate.



## Music and Dance

In India, life is inseparable from art. Music and dance are part of ceremony of any kind. Births, weddings, entering a new house, welcoming a guest, religious festivals - any or all of these are occasions for song and dance. Music and dance are probably the most elemental art forms, spontaneously expressing the entire gamut of human emotions and experiences. The names of the seven notes (**Sapta Swaras**) that form the basis of Indian music are commonly known. We know them as Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni, Sa. The syllables are not the full names of the notes. These are actually shortened versions. The full names of the Sapta Swaras are Shadja, Rishaba, Gandhara, Madyama, Panchama, Daivata and Nishada. The notes are categorised in increasing order of pitch. We say there are seven notes and not eight, because Sa repeats itself at the end of the scale. Sa's frequency at the end of the scale is exactly double that of the first Sa at the beginning of the scale. When the frequency of any note is exactly doubled, the same tone is heard, except

that this sounds higher. The interval between the original note and the higher note is called an **octave**. When the frequency of any note is exactly halved we hear it as lower. The interval between these two notes is also called an octave. In Indian music, a range of three octaves is generally used.



Indian music has fundamentally been a spiritual aid to realize one's true Self. Musical instruments were therefore associated with divinity, such as Damaru of Siva, Flute of Krishna, Conch of Vishnu, Drum of Nandi and Veena of Saraswati. The Sama Veda laid the foundation for Indian classical music. Carnatic music is the system of classical music associated with the southern part of the Indian subcontinent. The basis of **Carnatic music** is the system of ragas (melodic scales) and talas (rhythmic cycles). There are seven basic talas and seventy-two fundamental ragas. The three great composers of carnatic songs (kritis) of the 18th century, Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri are regarded today as the Trinity of Carnatic music.

Classical Indian dances are among the most graceful and beautiful in the world. They all make use of an intricate visual language, consisting of hand gestures, body movements, and postures. Lord Shiva is said to be the 'Nataraja' meaning 'King of All Dances', who is said to perform the Cosmic Dance that delicately balances life and death and all that is happening in the Universe in harmonious cycles. The seven major world-famous classical dance forms that originated and evolved in India are: Bharatanatyam from Tamil

Nadu and Karnataka, Kathakali, the classical dance-drama from Kerala, Manipuri from Manipur, Kathak from Uttar Pradesh, Odissi from Orissa, and Kuchipudi from Andhra Pradesh and Sattriya from Assam. They all adhere to the canons of classical dance laid down in the Natya Shastra, a second century C.E. text of the sage Bharata. Natyashastra is the most detail and elaborate of all treatises on dramatic criticism and acting ever written in any language and is regarded as the oldest surviving text on stagecraft in the world. With well-knit chapters, Natyashastra covers every aspect of Indian art and drama. From issues of literary construction, to the structure of the stage, from a detailed analysis of musical scales and movements, to an analysis of dance forms and their impact on the viewers, Natyashastra covers every possible facet. Its purpose is to entertain as well as educate.

Natyashastra consists of four elements:

1. pathya (text), including the art of recitation and rendition in performance taken from the Rig Veda;
2. geeta (song), including instrumental music from the Sama Veda,
3. abhinaya (acting), the technique of expressing the poetic meaning of the text and communicating it to the spectator from the Yajur Veda, and
4. rasa or aesthetic experience from the Atharva Veda.

Natyashastra is the fundamental basis of Indian classical music, dance, drama and art and laid the cornerstone of the fine arts in India. In India dance is a form of worship through which a dancer can reach the Almighty. It is also considered a medium of instruction of morality, good values, and scriptures and the expression of reality. There are some special features about Indian Classical dance which distinguish it from other dances of the world. All these dance forms use basically the same 'mudras' or signs of hand

as a common language of expression and were originally performed in the temples to entertain various Gods and Goddesses. All dance forms are structured around the Nava Rasas or nine primary emotions. They are as follows:

- i. Shringara - Love
- ii. Hasya - Mirth
- iii. Veera - Heroism
- iv. Roudra - Anger
- v. Bhayanaka - Terror
- vi. Bheebatsa - Disgust
- vii. Adbhuta - Wonder
- viii. Karuna - Compassion
- ix. Shanta - Tranquility

## Sports

During the era of the Vedas, Ramayana and Mahabharata, men of a certain stature were expected to be well - versed in chariot - racing, archery, military stratagems, swimming, wrestling and hunting. Women also excelled in sport and the art of self-defence. Several games now familiar across the world such as chess, snakes and ladders, playing cards, polo, the martial arts of judo and karate had originated in India and it was from here that these games were transmitted to foreign countries, where they were further developed. The ancient India martial art form of Kalaripayatu is said to be the origin of Judo and Karate. This art form seems to have travelled from India to the countries of the far-east along with the Buddhist religion. Bodhidharma, a Buddhist monk from India, introduced Kalari into China and Japan in the 5th century. He taught this art in a temple. This temple is today known as the Shaolin temple. The Chinese called him Po-ti-tama. What he taught has evolved into Karate and Kung Fu. One can

find a lot of similarities among the three. The renowned Chinese travellers Hieun Tsang and Fa Hien wrote of a plethora of sporting activities - swimming, sword-fighting (fencing, as we know it today), running, wrestling and ball games that were immensely popular among the students of Nalanda and Taxila. Many of the present day Olympic disciplines are sophisticated versions of the games involving strength and speed that were common in ancient India.

Let us conclude this chapter with a few quotes from eminent people around the world about India:

“We owe a lot to the Indians, who taught us how to count, without which no worthwhile scientific discovery could have been made!” - **Albert Einstein**

“India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grandmother of tradition. Our most valuable and most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India only.”— **Mark Twain (American writer)**

“If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions, I should point to India”– **Max Muller (German scholar)**

“Many of the advances in the sciences that we consider today to have been made in Europe were in fact made in India centuries ago.” - **Grant Duff (British Historian)**

“It is India that gave us the ingenious method of expressing all numbers by ten symbols each receiving a value of position as well as an absolute value a profound and important idea which appears so simple to us now that we ignore its true merit.” - **Pierre Simon de Laplace (French Scientist)**

“If there is one place on the face of earth where all the dreams of living men have found a home from the very earliest days when man began the dream

of existence, it is India!” - **Romaine Rolland (French scholar)**

“India conquered and dominated China culturally for 20 centuries without ever having to send a single soldier across her border.” - **Hu Shih (Former Ambassador of China to USA)**

“Civilizations have arisen in other parts of the world. In ancient and modern times, wonderful ideas have been carried forward from one race to another...But mark you, my friends, it has been always with the blast of war trumpets and the march of embattled cohorts. Each idea had to be soaked in a deluge of blood..... Each word of power had to be followed by the groans of millions, by the wails of orphans, by the tears of widows. This, many other nations have taught; but India for thousands of years peacefully existed. Here activity prevailed when even Greece did not exist... Even earlier, when history has no record, and tradition dares not peer into the gloom of that intense past, even from until now, ideas after ideas have marched out from her, but every word has been spoken with a blessing behind it and peace before it. We, of all nations of the world, have never been a conquering race, and that blessing is on our head, and therefore we live....!” - **Swami Vivekananda**

“India will teach us the tolerance and gentleness of mature mind, understanding spirit and a unifying, pacifying love for all human beings.” - **Will Durant (American historian)**

“It is already becoming clearer that a chapter which has a western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of the human race. At this supremely dangerous moment in history, the only way of salvation for mankind is the Indian way.” - **Dr. Arnold Toynbee (British historian)**

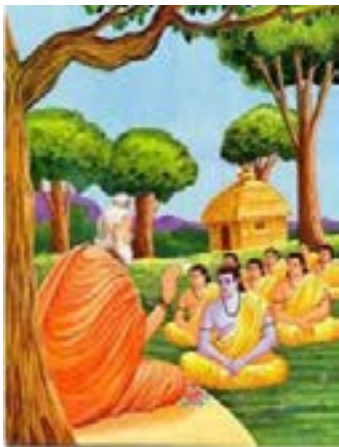
“There are some parts of the world that, once visited, get into your heart and won't go. For me, India is such a place.” - **Keith Bellows (Editor-in-chief, National Geographic Society)**

## Chapter 2

### Educational system in India

#### Ancient Indian Education

In ancient India, education was based on a close relationship between the teacher and the pupil. The pupil would approach the teacher earnestly seeking knowledge. The student would then live with the teacher as a member of the family. The school was usually a hermitage, amid sylvan surroundings, beyond the distractions of urban life, functioning in solitude and natural beauty. The close association between the teacher and student was vital to the education as conceived in this system. The pupil would not only learn the subject but also imbibe the positive qualities of the teacher.



The making of man depends on individual attention and treatment to be given by the teacher. Here the personal touch, the living relationship between the pupil and teacher make education. The pupil belongs to the teacher and

not to an institution. A modern school teaches pupil by 'classes' and not as a unique individual. Just as a tailor stitches clothes according to the measurements of each individual, the education system of ancient India catered to the unique needs of each student.

The pupil's first daily duty is to walk to the woods, collect fuel, and fetch it home. Taking care of the cattle and doing the household work was training the pupil in self-help, the dignity of labour, of service to society and fostered student-brotherhood. It also gave an opportunity for outdoor life and robust physical

exercise. The Upanishads mention three steps of education called: **Sravanam, Mananam and Nididhyasanam**. **Sravanam** is listening to the instruction of the teacher and learning from him. Hearing of texts and words uttered by the teacher is to be followed by the process of **Mananam**, which is reflection on the topic taught. Therefore, there is the third stage of learning, called **Nididhyasanam**, by which he fully assimilates the concepts he has been taught.

#### World's Earliest Universities

Takshashila (also called Taxila) was one of the ancient universities in India and was recognized as the intellectual capital of India. Its period of existence is from 1000 B.C.E to 500 C.E, and was the first university in the world. It attracted scholars from different and distant parts of India. Students poured in from far-off places like Rajagaha, Mithila, Ujjeni, Kosala, Benares and many more. The students came to Takshashila to complete their education as it was a University for higher learning. The name of the place was a tribute to Taksha, founder of the city of Takshashila. It was situated twenty miles to the west of Rawalpindi currently in Pakistan. Takshashila offered a wide variety of courses both in literary and technical fields, commonly known as Vedas and Silpas.

Rigveda, Yajurveda, and Samaveda were taught under the course of Vedas. The studies of six auxiliary sciences were also a vital part of Vedas. These included the science of correct pronunciation, guiding the performance of various rites and sacrifices, grammar, astronomy, prosody and etymology. Silpas were eighteen in number and included subjects like craft or vocation based on practical skills. Law, mathematics, accountancy, agriculture, commerce, cattle breeding, archery, medicine etc. were also taught. Apart from theory, practical sessions were also

made mandatory in the curriculum. This helped in the better understanding of subjects.

Takshashila comprised a number of special schools. This included schools of medicine, law, and military science. One of its military schools had one hundred and three princes from all over India as students. Thus the teachers of Takshashila were famous for their military knowledge as well. Takshashila's accomplishments as a university can be mainly credited to the teachers. Discipline was a must at Takshashila. Scholarships were given to some poor students for their education. Students resided with their teachers under a common roof.



Students had freedom of choice regarding their studies at the university. With great pride we can say that our most revered scholars of the past, Chanakya, Panini and Jivaka were students of Takshashila. Panini was a great grammarian of the Sanskrit language; Chanakya was the prime minister of Chandragupta Maurya and Jivaka was a famous physician who was an expert in the field of medicine. In the middle of fifth century C.E, when the Hunas attacked the place, this resplendent seat of learning was fully destroyed. The attack on the city thus ended a most significant chronicle of education in the history of India. Takshashila had great influence on Indian culture and Sanskrit language. Chanakya, the strategist who guided Chandragupta Maurya and assisted in the founding of the Mauryan empire studied and taught here. The Arthashastra (The knowledge of Economics) of Chanakya, is said to have been composed in Takshashila itself. The ancient grammarian Panini who codified the rules that would define Classical Sanskrit, has also been part of the community at Takshashila.

Charaka, the ayurvedic physician also studied and later taught at Takshashila. The institution is also very significant in Buddhist tradition. Jivaka, the court physician of Magadha who once cured the Buddha also studied at Takshashila.

India had her first global university in Nalanda, located in Bihar, one thousand five hundred years ago, way back in the 5th century CE. This University had multi-storeyed buildings and even entrance examinations for admissions to it. Nalanda was one of the greatest centers of higher learning. Most of the collegiate buildings as well as the residential buildings were four-storeyed with beautifully sculpted pillars. It was the most well known University in India at that period and the most sought-after by scholars not only in India but all over Asia. A doctrine approved and recognized here would be universally accepted. Nalanda was open to all systems and schools of thought and belief. Nalanda was a residential school, i.e., it had dormitories for students. In its heyday, it accommodated over 10,000 students and 2,000 teachers. The school was considered an architectural masterpiece, and was marked by a lofty wall. Nalanda had eight separate compounds and ten temples, along with many other meditation halls and classrooms. On the grounds were lakes and parks. The complex was built with red bricks and its occupied an area of 14 hectares. The library was located in a nine-storied building where meticulous copies of texts were produced. The subjects taught at Nalanda covered every field of learning, and it attracted pupils and scholars from Korea, Japan, China, Tibet, Indonesia, Persia and Turkey.

Nalanda was noted for its specializations in the last stages of University education, for aiding in the clearance of doubts and training in the art of public speaking. Scholars from China, Tibet, Mongolia and even Korea came to Nalanda. In fact, a fellowship of Nalanda was considered as the highest academic degree or distinction of those times. Hence, the University had the system of entrance examinations, and qualifying for

admission was not an easy task. That the entrance examinations were tough is evident from the fact that only about twenty percentage of the total number of students who appeared for the test finally succeeded.



The courses of study offered at Nalanda were drawn from several different fields- Vedic and Buddhist, philosophical and practical, sciences and arts, and in all

its branches of studies, Nalanda was considered as the highest seat of learning. Scholars like Hiuen Tsang, who were already masters in their field, considered it profitable to stay at Nalanda for further intellectual progress. Though the University specialized in Mahayana Buddhism, the works of the Hinayana school were also taught, indicating the comprehensive nature of the curriculum.

The University provided for all its students food, clothing, bedding and medicine. The academic life at Nalanda was strict, and the residents had to observe several rules and regulations. The university had a rich library also. Information about the library is given in Tibetan accounts, which mention that the library comprised three huge buildings, called Ratnasagara, Ratnadadhi and Ratnaranjaka. One of the buildings was nine stories high and housed the most sacred manuscripts. The library not only collected religious manuscripts but also had texts on such subjects as grammar, logic, literature, astronomy, and medicine. The scholars at Nalanda were some of the most well-known of their times. Nalanda retained her glory and prestige as the highest centre of learning for several centuries, until in 1197 when Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji and his army attacked Bihar. The library was destroyed during the invasion in which Bakhtiyar Khilji sacked it and set it to flames. It was so vast that it is reported to have burned for three months

(according to Persian historian Minhaj-i-Siraj) after the invaders set fire to it, ransacked and destroyed the monasteries and killed or drove the monks from the site.

Needless to say, the decline of Nalanda was not just the decline of an institution, but of an entire system of education. Besides Nalanda and Takshashila there were other Universities such as Vikramasila, Mithila, Nadia, Jagaddala and Odantapuri. The destruction of the temples, monasteries, centres of learning at Nalanda and other great Universities of India was largely responsible for the decline of Indian scientific discoveries and contributions.

### **The Impact of British Colonial Rule**

Most of the foreigners came to India in search of her fabulous wealth. India had, at that time, a very well spread system of education and that system was targeted by the British. Here are the facts about how the British destroyed the Indian educational system and made one of the most literate nations illiterate. In the Round-Table conference in 1931, Mahatma Gandhi in one of his speeches said, “The beautiful tree of education was cut down by you British. Therefore today India is far more illiterate than it was 100 years ago.” Later Shri Dharampal published a book “The Beautiful Tree” where this matter has been discussed in great detail. The book uses British documents from the early 1800s to show that education was fairly universal at that time. Each village had a school and the children of all communities attended these schools.

W. Adam, writing in 1835, estimated that there were 100,000 schools in Bengal, one school for about 500 boys. He also described the local medical system that included inoculation against small-pox. Sir Thomas Munro (1826), writing about schools in Madras, found similar statistics. The education system in the Punjab during the Ranjit Singh kingdom was equally extensive. By the time the students came out of the schools they had acquired valuable skills and had proper

insight into their own culture. In England only the children of the nobles were given education and only after the British came to India they adopted the system for educating all the children. By 1820, the British had destroyed the financial resources that supported the Indian educational system. In his speech to British Parliament in 1835, Thomas Macaulay said, “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect”. The British brought in more changes after this which further destroyed the cultural foundation of the Indian education system.

A nation which wants to forget about itself and imitate other nations cannot redeem itself but is on the path of self-destruction. If we truly do not want to weaken ourselves as a nation, we need to obtain a fresh and untainted understanding of our ideals and culture; for these have held us together as a nation for over ten thousand years. Let us conclude this chapter with some quotes about the education system of India:

“Out of the past is built the future. Look back, therefore as far as you can drink deep of the eternal fountains that are behind and after that look forward, march forward and make India brighter, greater, much higher than she ever was. Our ancestors were great. We must first recall that. We must learn the elements of our being, the blood, that courses in our veins; we must build an India yet greater than what she has been.” – Swami Vivekananda

“The main purpose of education should be to impart a culture of the heart. Along with knowledge about the world, we have to understand ourselves. Only then will our education be complete.” — Amma

## Chapter 3

### Insights from Mahabharata

Vyasa's Mahabharata is one of our noblest heritages. To hear it faithfully told is to love it and come under its elevating influence. It strengthens the soul and drives home, as nothing else does, the vanity of ambition and the evil and futility of anger and hatred. Since literature is closely related to life, so long as the human family is divided into nations, literature cannot escape the effects of such division. But the highest literature transcends regionalism and through it, when we are properly attuned, we realise the essential oneness of the human family. The Mahabharata is of this class. It belongs to the world and not only to India.



To the people of India, indeed, this epic has been an unfailing and perennial source of spiritual strength. Learnt at the mother's knee with reverence and love, it has inspired great men to heroic deeds as well as enabled the humble to face their trials with fortitude and faith. The Mahabharata has shaped the character and civilization of India. How did it fulfill this function? By its gospel of Dharma which runs like a golden thread through all the complex movements of the epic; by its lesson that hatred breeds hatred that covetousness and violence lead inevitably to ruin and that the only real conquest is in the battle against one's own lower nature. Let

us look at a few characters and situations from the Mahabharata and learn these examples.

#### 1. Abhimanyu

One of the sterling stories of bravery and sacrifice in the whole of Mahabharata is the story of Abhimanyu, Arjuna's son. The Kaurava's, through Chakravyuha was creating great damage to the Pandava army and they were finding it extremely difficult to hold out. Only Abhimanyu knew how to break through this enemy formation. He had learnt from Krishna when he was in his mother's womb how to break through the formation but not how to get out.

Abhimanyu takes on the task of breaking through the Chakravyuha fully knowing that he risked his life if aid did not reach in time to defend him as promised by Yudhistira. From Abhimanyu's life, we learn the important lesson of placing the larger interest and survival of our team or society over our own individual interests. For building a great nation, it is essential for its citizens to place social good ahead of their personal interests.

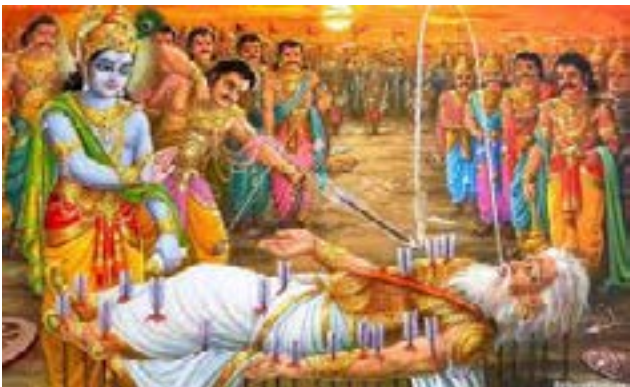
#### 2. Arjuna

Arjuna is acclaimed as the greatest archer of all times. Arjuna acquired his skills through his absolute dedication under the able guidance of his guru Dronacharya. An incident is narrated in Mahabharata when he is expected to shoot a bird perched on the branch of a tree. Drona is training the Pandavas and Kauravas and asks each one what they see while aiming at the bird. Others reply that they see the tree, branches, leaves, bird, etc. But when the question was put to Arjuna he replied that he saw only the eye of the bird. In one shot he is able to hit the target perfectly. This tells us about the absolute dedication and concentration achieved by Arjuna while training to be a great archer. This example illustrates the

importance of dedication and concentration to achieve excellence in any area of pursuit in our lives.

### 3. Bhishma

One of the grand characters of Mahabharata is Bhishma. The battle of the tenth day raged in greater fierceness. Bhishma was a terror to the enemies. Arjuna faced him and a terrible fight followed. As the fight progressed, Shikhandi appeared before Bhishma ready with weapons to fight with him. At once Bhishma threw down his bow and arrows. Arjuna's arrows had already weakened him. He fell to the ground. But his body did not touch the ground. Arjuna's arrows had formed a bed for him. Bhishma thanked Arjuna for having given him a hero's bed of piercing arrows. He said, "I want a pillow! Give me a pillow of arrows!" Arjuna raised the old warrior's head and shot arrows piercing the ground. Bhishma's head rested on them. By then Duryodhana, Karna, Kripa and other leaders of the Kaurava army raced to the spot where Bhishma lay. Yudhishtira, Bhima and others too stood near him.

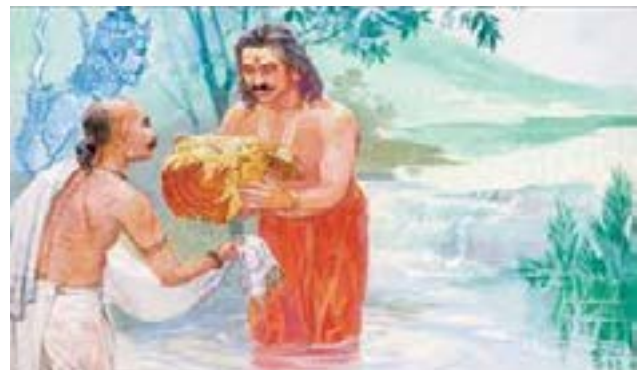


Bhishma was thirsty and asked for water. Duryodhana asked his men to bring water. Bhishma smiled even in his pain and said to him, "My son, the water I seek is not the water you offer." He then looked at Arjuna. Arjuna understood his mind. He sent an arrow which pierced deep into the ground; crystal-clear waters shot up in fountains and fell straight into the open mouth of Bhishma. The stream of water welling up from the ground was none other than Mother Ganga

coming in the steam form to quench the thirst of her beloved son Bhishma. He felt the living presence of his mother and even while lying on the bed of arrows felt that he was resting on the lap of his mother.

After the war was over, Yudhishtira was crowned. He went with Sri Krishna to pay his respects to Bhishma and seek his blessings. Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadeva and Draupadi were all there. They touched his feet and he blessed them. His last words of advice to Yudhishtira were: "Protect Dharma. Punish the wicked. Do not give up Truth. Give up egoism. Rule in the interests of the subjects. May you all prosper!" Bhishma gazed upon Krishna in great joy. He said, "Where there is Lord Krishna there is Dharma (right conduct) and where there is Dharma there is victory. I bow to you, my Master. You are the Lord of all the worlds. I am tired of this life. Dharma has triumphed and I am happy. So now I leave the earth." Bhishma's life teaches us that a life of supreme sacrifice and determination is possible if we pledge to dedicate ourselves for a cause without being distracted from our resolve under any circumstances.

### 4. Karna



Karna is one of the glorious characters of Mahabharata that almost all are familiar with. In Karna, as fate would have it, we find a tragic hero with wonderful qualities who ended up being on the wrong side of the warring factions. He is one of the most likeable characters of the epic and we find it difficult to accept that Karna sided with the

Kauravas. In Karna we see a perfect example of someone who is given to charity.

Karna had the reputation of being a man of great charity. Taking advantage of this, Indra approaches him in disguise and asks him for his armour. Karna removes the armour and hands it over fully knowing that he is giving away his own life. As long as he was wearing the armour Karna was invincible. Even Indra is astounded by Karna's generosity and gives him an invincible divine weapon which can be used only once.

## 5. Sri Krishna



A question is often asked. Was it possible to avoid Kurukshetra war? Some people find fault with Sri Krishna that he did not do his best to avoid war. First of all, let us have a look at the context. It is a war between the Kauravas and Pandavas, where the Kauravas have violated all the principles of Dharma to unlawfully capture the Pandava's kingdom. The Pandavas have fulfilled all the conditions by staying for their twelve years in the forests and one year in disguise. When the Pandavas come back and rightfully ask for the return of their kingdom, the Kauravas refused to keep their promise. Lord Krishna tries to establish peace by offering to accept only five villages for the Pandavas. But Duryodhana refuses to part with even a pinpoint of the kingdom that he has taken from the Pandavas. He even tries to imprison Sri Krishna. So, we can see that Sri Krishna had made all possible efforts to prevent the war. To Sri Krishna, war was only the last resort when all other avenues of peace were closed.

It should be noted that when the Vedas say that one should practice ahimsa, this is the general rule. There are some extreme cases—for example, when a foreign country invades your country—wherein ahimsa should not be maintained by all sections of society. In Indian culture, only one member has a vow of total ahimsa—the sannyasi. However, this is not the dharma of a king. It is the king's duty to protect his citizens and punish the wicked. To sit back and say, ahimsa paramo dharma [the highest dharma is nonviolence] at such a time would itself be adharma.

No one has demonstrated this principle more perfectly than Sri Krishna. As Amma explains, "Sri Krishna never wanted the war. His was the path of patience and tolerance. He showed utmost patience. If by exercising patience, a person of power induces another to continue committing acts of himsa, emboldening them to further harass others, then that person's patience is in fact the highest form of himsa. If someone's patience is only making someone else all the more egoistic, it's best to cast off that patience. However we should be careful that our actions are not coming from feelings of vengeance or rivalry against that person. We should make sure that our anger isn't directed at the individual but at the individual's wrong actions. ... It was only after having exhausted every other possible option for peace that Sri Krishna gave the nod to commence war."

Before the Mahabharata battle began, Lord Krishna gave Arjuna and Duryodhana a choice. Krishna told them, 'I can give My entire army to one of you but I will not come. Or, I can come without any weapons as your charioteer and My army will help your foe. Which do you choose, Me or My army?' Without hesitation Arjuna said, 'I want you, Lord. You alone are enough. I do not need the army.'

Now within the battle itself, Arjuna had a fight with Karna who was a far superior archer. Intending to sever Arjuna's head, Karna shot a

divine missile. Lord Krishna, Arjuna's charioteer, foresaw this great karmic danger coming towards Arjuna. Immediately, the compassionate Lord made the five horses kneel down and pushed the chariot wheels a few inches down into the earth by pressing hard with his big toe. This made the arrow take away Arjuna's crown without injuring any part of his body.

There are a few points to remember regarding this story. First, the Lord was Arjuna's charioteer. This means that Arjuna chose the Lord to be the one to hold the reins of his life's chariot. Arjuna knew how to discriminate. He chose the Divine Lord alone to help him. That makes a big difference. The Grace of the Lord lets the karmic arrow pass over your head, maybe destroying an insignificant crown or something similar, but saving you from a fatal mishap.

Second, Duryodhana and the Kauravas were a much bigger and better army than Arjuna and the Pandavas. They had many great warriors and were stronger in every way. Duryodhana and his army represent human power and strength without the aspect of Grace. Thus, as a result of their arrogance, wickedness, and egotism, the Kauravas were ruined. However, Arjuna and the Pandavas were able to win the battle through effort coupled with the Grace of the Lord.

### **Vidura's Guidance**

Vidura was known for speaking the truth and for his intelligence and depth of knowledge. He served both Pandu and Dhritharashtra as a minister. It was Vidura who supported Pandu's election to the kingship as Dhritharashtra was not suitable for the role. Upon Pandu's abdication and the blind Dhritharashtra's succession, Vidura took on the reins of government for all practical purposes, guiding his brother's government until Duryodhana came of age. He was a friend of the Pandavas and saved them from harm on many occasions such when Duryodhana tried to burn the Pandavas in the wax palace. In spite of being a royal minister, Vidura led a simple life. It was

Vidura who protested against the humiliation of Draupadi in the Kaurava court.

When Krishna visited Hastinapura as a peace emissary of the Pandavas, he declined Duryodhana's offer to stay in the royal palace, preferring instead the home of Vidura. Even when Sri Krishna asked only for five villages for the Pandavas, the Kauravas did not agree and opted for war. In protest against the adharmic behavior of the Kauravas, Vidura resigned from the post of minister. After the great battle, Yudhishtira appointed Vidura as the prime minister with complete control of the government. Soon after, Vidura retired to the forests for devoting himself to spiritual pursuit.

'Vidura Neeti' is the guidance given by Vidura to Dhrithrashtra in the great epic Mahabharata. Vidura was a paragon of truth, dutifulness, impartial judgement and steadfast dharma. However, this guidance was not followed by Dhrithrashtra due to excessive attachment to his son Duryodhana. The consequence of not heeding the wise words of Vidura was the Mahabharata War in which all the sons of Dhrithrashtra perished. The following is a selection of verses from Vidura Neeti:



### **Who is wise?**

1. That one is wise who does not deviate from the higher goals of life rooted as he is in self-knowledge, endeavour, forbearance and adherence to dharma.

2. That one is wise whose activities are preceded by a firm commitment, who does not take long rests before the task is accomplished, who does not waste his time and who has control over his mind.
3. That one is wise who does not rejoice when honoured, does not become dejected when dishonoured and is not swayed by emotions under the most trying circumstances.
4. That one is wise who, even after acquiring great wealth, learning or control over others, goes about his job without being conceited in the least.

### Who is foolish?

5. That one is a fool who makes the enemy his friend, hurts and kills his friend and always engages himself in wrongful activity.
6. That one is a fool who spreads out his actions, entertains doubts about everything and takes a long time for actions which should be done with the utmost urgency.
7. That one is the greatest fool who finds fault with others when he himself has such faults and who gets angry when he himself has no control over the one at whom the anger is directed.

### Control of senses

8. Goddess Lakshmi is always with people who keep their senses and mind under control, who punish wrong-doers, whose actions are preceded by a thorough examination of its pros and cons and who is of great determination.
9. This body is the chariot, buddhi (intellect) is the charioteer and the senses are the horses. One who controls all these travels happily in this world like the charioteer who has controlled the horses of the chariot.
10. Just like the uncontrolled horses will throw the unskilled charioteer to the ground, the senses which are not subdued and are not under control are capable of destroying a person.

### Control of anger

11. King! One who controls anger which arises in the mind with great force and does not lose his cool in calamities is a fit repository of wealth and fortune. He deserves wealth and fortune.

### Five to be worshipped

12. By worshipping and serving the five, namely, devas, ancestors, sages, human beings, and all living beings one will achieve fame and recognition.

### Five that will follow you

13. These five will follow you wherever you go meaning you will find them wherever you go – friends, enemies, those who are neutral, those on whom you depend and those who depend on you.

### Six inner enemies

14. He who gains control on the six enemies who are ever present in a person, namely kama (lust), krodha (anger), lobha (greed), moha (attachment), mada (arrogance), maatsyarya (jealousy) and who has conquered his senses - sin will not touch that person, what to talk of misfortunes.

### Six tips for happiness

15. Good health, not to be in debt, not being forced to live in an alien land, company of good people, earning a livelihood by one's own skill or knowledge and living without fear – these six things make one's life happy and joyful.

### Seven vices

16. The following seven bad habits will lead to the downfall of even a well-established king: Lust, gambling, hunting, intoxicating drinks, use of harsh words, inflicting very harsh punishment for minor offences and misuse of the treasury.

### Eight noble qualities

17. Intelligence, noble birth, control of the senses, learning, valour, control on speech, giving

to others according to one's capacity and gratitude, these eight qualities adorn a person.

### **Victory**

18. One who does not lose heart even when facing difficulties but puts in efforts to overcome them, has the capacity to endure pain and suffering and can shoulder responsibilities – for such a person victory over his enemies is guaranteed.

### **Character and good conduct**

19. One who is not overjoyed on his good fortune, does not enjoy the misfortune of others and having gifted a thing to someone later does not regret his giving - such a person is said to be of very exemplary conduct and character.
20. Dharma is protected by Truth, beauty is protected by cleanliness and the family is protected by good conduct.

Here is a story from Mahabharatha:

### **THE ENCHANTED POOL**

THE stipulated period of twelve years was drawing to a close. Bhima said: "When Draupadi was dragged into the assembly, we should have killed those wretches. Is it not because we did not do so that we have had to suffer all these sorrows?" and he looked at Arjuna sadly. Arjuna agreed. "I bore in silence the vulgar and insulting brag of that son of the charioteer, doing nothing. So we have deservedly fallen into this pitiable state." Yudhishtira noticed with sorrow that all of them had lost their cheerfulness and courage. He thought they would be more cheerful with something to do. He was tormented with thirst and so he said to Nakula: "Brother, climb that tree and see whether there is any pool or river nearby." Nakula climbed the tree, looked around and said: "At a little distance I see water plants and cranes. There must certainly be water there." Yudhishtira sent him to fetch some to drink.

Nakula was glad when he got to the place and saw there was a pool. He was very thirsty himself and so

thought of quenching his thirst first before taking water in his quiver for his brother. But no sooner did he dip his hand in the transparent water than he heard a voice, which said: "Do not be rash. This pool belongs to me. O son of Madri, answer my questions and then drink the water." Nakula was surprised, but carried away by his intense thirst and heedless of the warning, he drank the water. At once, overcome by irresistible drowsiness, he fell down, to all appearance dead. Surprised that Nakula had not returned, Yudhishtira sent Sahadeva to see what the matter was. When Sahadeva reached the pool and saw his brother lying on the ground, he wondered whether any harm had come to him. But before looking into the matter further, he rushed irresistibly to the water to quench his burning thirst. The voice was heard again: "O Sahadeva, this is my pool. Answer my questions and then only may you quench your thirst." Like Nakula, Sahadeva also did not heed the warning. He drank the water and at once dropped down.

Puzzled and worried that Sahadeva also did not return, Yudhishtira sent Arjuna to see whether the brothers had met with any danger. "And bring water," he added, for he was very thirsty. Arjuna went swiftly. He saw both his brothers lying dead near the pool. He was shocked at the sight and felt that they must have been killed by some lurking foe. Though heart-broken with grief and burning with the desire for revenge, he felt all feelings submerged in a monstrous thirst, which irresistibly impelled him to the fatal pool. Again, a voice was heard: "Answer my question before you



drink the water. This pool is mine. If you disobey me, you will follow your brothers.” Arjuna’s anger knew no bounds. He cried: “Who are you? Come and stand up to me, and I will kill you,” and he shot keen-edged arrows in the direction of the voice. The invisible being laughed in scorn: “Your arrows do but wound the air. Answer my questions and then you can satisfy your thirst. If you drink the water without doing so, you will die.” Greatly vexed, Arjuna made up his mind to seek out and grapple with this elusive foe. But first he had to quench his terrible thirst. Yes, thirst was the enemy he must kill first. So he drank the water and also fell down dead.

After anxious waiting Yudhishtira turned to Bhima: “Dear brother, Arjuna, the great hero, has also not yet returned. Something terrible must have happened to our brothers, for our stars are bad. Please seek them out and be quick about it. Also bring water, for I die of thirst.” Bhima, racked with anxiety, hurried away without a word. His grief and rage can be imagined when he saw his three brothers lying there dead. He thought: “This is certainly the work of the Yakshas. I will hunt them down and kill them. But O! I am so thirsty, I shall first drink water the better to fight them.” And then he descended into the pool. The voice shouted: “Bhima, beware. You may drink only after answering my questions. You will die if you disregard my words.” “Who are you to dictate to me?” cried Bhima, and he drank the water avidly, glaring around in defiance. And as he did so, his great strength seemed to slip from him like a garment. And he also fell dead among his brothers.

Alone, Yudhishtira wailed full of anxiety and thirst. “Have they been subjected to a curse or are they wandering about in the forest in a vain search for water or have they fainted or died of thirst?” Unable to bear these thoughts and driven desperate by an overpowering thirst, he started out to look for his brothers and the pool. Yudhishtira proceeded in the direction his brothers had taken through tracts infested with wild boar and abounding in spotted deer and huge

forest birds. Presently he came upon a beautiful green meadow, girdling a pool of pellucid water, nectar to his eyes. But when he saw his brothers lying there like sacred flagpoles thrown pell-mell after a festival, unable to restrain his grief, he lifted his voice and wept.

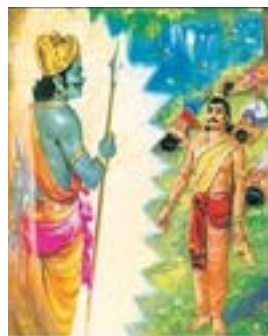
He stroked the faces of Bhima and Arjuna as they lay so still and silent there and mourned: “Was this to be the end of all our vows? Just when our exile is about to end, you have been snatched away. Even the gods have forsaken me in my misfortune!” As he looked at their mighty limbs, now so helpless, he sadly wondered who could have been powerful enough to kill them. Brokenly, he reflected: “Surely my heart must be made of steel not to break even after seeing Nakula and Sahadeva dead. For what purpose should I continue to live in this world?” Then a sense of mystery overcame him, for this could be no ordinary occurrence. The world held no warriors who could overcome his brothers. Besides, there were no wounds on their bodies which could have let out life and their faces were faces of men who slept in peace and not of those who died in wrath. There was also no trace of the footprints of an enemy. There was surely some magic about it. Or, could it be a trick played by Duryodhana? Might he not have poisoned the water? Then Yudhishtira also descended into the pool, in his turn drawn to the water by a consuming thirst. At once the voice without form warned as before: “Your brothers died because they did not heed my words. Do not follow them. Answer my questions first and then quench your thirst. This pool is mine.”

Yudhishtira knew that these could be none other than the words of a Yaksha and guessed what had happened to his brothers. He saw a possible way of redeeming the situation. He said to the bodiless voice: “Please ask your questions.” The voice put questions rapidly one after another. Yudhishtira answered them all.

1. “What makes sun shine every day?”  
“The power of God.”

2. "What rescues man in danger?"  
"Courage is man's salvation in danger."
3. "By the study of which science does man become wise?"  
"It is by association with the great in wisdom that he gets wisdom."
4. "What is more nobly sustaining than the earth?"  
"The mother who brings up the children she has borne is nobler and more sustaining than the earth."
5. "What is higher than the sky?"  
"The father."
6. "What is fleetier than wind?"  
"Mind."
7. "What is more blighted than withered straw?"  
"A sorrow-stricken heart."
8. "What befriends a traveller?"  
"Learning."
9. "Who accompanies a man in death?"  
"Dharma. That alone accompanies the soul in its solitary journey after death."
10. "Which is the biggest vessel?"  
"The earth, which contains all within itself is the greatest vessel."
11. "What is happiness?"  
"Happiness is the result of good conduct."
12. "What is that, abandoning which man becomes loved by all?"  
"Pride, for abandoning that man will be loved by all."
13. "What is the loss which yields joy and not sorrow?"  
"Anger, giving it up, we will no longer subject to sorrow."
14. "What is that, by giving up which, man becomes rich?"  
"Desire, getting rid of it, man becomes wealthy."
15. "What is the greatest wonder in the world?"  
"Every day, men see creatures depart to Yama's abode and yet, those who remain

seek to live forever. This verily is the greatest wonder."



Thus, the Yaksha posed many questions and Yudhishtira answered them all. In the end the Yaksha asked: "O king, one of your dead brothers can now be revived. Whom do you want revived? He shall come back to life."

Yudhishtira thought for a moment and then replied: "May the cloud-complexioned, lotus-eyed, broad-chested and long-armed Nakula, lying like a fallen ebony tree, arise." The Yaksha was pleased at this and asked Yudhishtira: "Why did you choose Nakula in preference to Bhima who has the strength of sixteen thousand elephants? I have heard that Bhima is most dear to you. And why not Arjuna, whose prowess in arms is your protection? Tell me why you chose Nakula rather than either of these two."

Yudhishtira replied: "O Yaksha, dharma is the only shield of man and not Bhima or Arjuna. If dharma is set at naught, man will be ruined. Kunti and Madri were the two wives of my father. I am surviving, a son of Kunti, and so, she is not completely bereaved. In order that the scales of justice may be even, I ask that Madri's son Nakula may revive." The Yaksha was pleased with Yudhishtira's impartiality and granted that all his brothers would come back to life. It was Yama, the Lord of Death, who had taken the form of the deer and the Yaksha so that he might see his son Yudhishtira and test him. He embraced Yudhishtira and blessed him. Yama said: "Only a few days remain to complete the stipulated period of your exile in the forest. The thirteenth year will also pass by. None of your enemies will be able to discover you. You will successfully fulfil your undertaking," and saying this he disappeared.

Reference: MAHABHARATA retold by C. Rajagopalachari

## Chapter 4

### The Human Personality

#### **The three gunas (qualities):**

According to science, the Universe is made up of basic physical particles: electrons, protons, neutrons. At a more basic level, there are mesons, gluons and quarks. At a subtle level, the Universe is made up of something even more basic. These are the three subtle basic components, known as the three gunas (qualities):

1. Sattva
2. Rajas
3. Tamas

Every being in prakriti (nature/creation) is made up of the three gunas: Sattva, Rajas and Tamas) in its core psyche. This concept may seem new to some of us. But they are the very fabric of the creation of the universe (human, animal and everything around us - living and non-living). Depending on which one of the three subtle components is predominant within us, it influences how we:

- React to situations
- Make decisions
- Make choices
- Live our lives

Sattva is purity and kindness; Rajas is activity and drive; Tamas is laziness and inertia. In other words, every human being's mind-stuff is made of a mixture of these three basic qualities in different proportions. All words, actions, temperaments, aspirations, conduct and character of every individual person are reflected by the proportion in which these three qualities exist in the mind. No individual's conduct, character, aspirations, values and drives are same as another person's. Why is it so? It is purely because the ratio in which these three qualities are built in the psyche of each person is different.

To understand these qualities better, let us see what each of these qualities represents more elaborately.

#### **Sattva (Purity and kindness):**

This guna is nearest to divinity. The Sattvic person has noble qualities such as: compassion, devotion, truthfulness, kindness, soft speech, control over senses, patience, forgiveness, humility and contentment.

#### **Rajas (Action and Drive):**

This quality is the basic fuel for actions. Depending on proportion of the other two qualities, Rajas will bring about actions pertaining to sattva or tamas. When combined with sattva, it will bring about positive actions. When combined with tamas, it will bring about destructive actions. The Rajasic person has the following qualities: Activity, drive, ambition, motivation, desire for leadership, domination, competitive instinct, strenuous effort, fighting spirit.

#### **Tamas (Laziness and Inertia):**

The predominantly tamasic person has the following qualities: Laziness, dullness, lack of motivation, incorrect understanding, negative outlook, excess sleep and fear. A small amount of tamas is also necessary as it helps one to relax and sleep.

#### **The Human Mind is a Mixture of Trigunas**

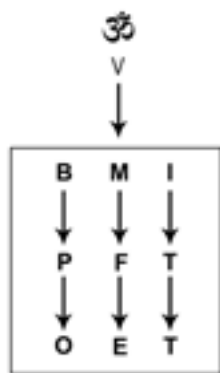
*How do these qualities find their place in a human mind?*

One of the foundation stones of Sanatana Dharama is the concept of Karma and rebirth. Every human being takes birth in this world and engages in action – karma. Actions are driven by aspirations and desires; Aspirations and desires are propelled by vasanas, that you acquire based on the imprint of your past experiences (also known as samskaras).

Some of one's desires may get satisfied through one's actions in this birth whereas some may not; some actions create very strong vasanas (impressions) inside one's psyche and may even work like fuel added to fire to increase the cravings. But unfortunately, the human life span is limited. So when one dies, one's unfulfilled desires, cravings, dreams, love, hatred, and spiritual aspirations are carried as vasanas along with the soul (subtle body). When the soul takes a rebirth, its psyche comes built essentially with the appropriate mix of trigunas, based on the vasanas.

### The B-M-I Chart

The eleven letters of the B-M-I chart (below) provide a deeper understanding of our own self in a nutshell. We can start vertically from the top and go down to see what is meant by each letter on the chart.



ॐ = Supreme Reality, the Self, Atma

V = Vasanas

B = Body	M = Mind	I = Intellect
P = Perceiver	F = Feeler	T = Thinker
O = Objects	E = Emotions	T = Thoughts

When we look at a person as an individual, we normally include three things that determine his individuality or personality.

### **What are those three things that determine our personality?**

The combination of the body, mind and intellect put together is what we call a person or a personality. Each individual, unique to himself,

expresses into the world through these three instruments - the body, mind and intellect.

How does the individual express himself through these three instruments? When he is expressing himself through the body (B), he is the perceiver (P) of the world of objects (O). The objects of the world and experiences can be many. He enjoys a multitude of objects in the world through the body as the perceiver of the objects. Through the mind (M), he expresses as a feeler (F) feeling different emotions (E). The mind is the seat of emotions through which he feels different emotions like happiness, sadness, and anger. When we are expressing in the world through the mind, we can easily tell if the mind is in a happy or sad disposition. We see that somebody looks sad and we keep asking, "What's wrong? Are you not in a good mood? You're not your normal self!" The third and last medium of expression is the intellect (I), which is used by the individual to express himself as the thinker (T) with different kinds of firm thoughts (T). With the intellect, he thinks or is supposed to think.

These are the three instruments whereby a human being can express himself. Now we have to understand what the body is, what the mind is, what the intellect is. The body has five organs of perception and five organs of action. Through the five organs of perception, we perceive the world. After having perceived the world, whatever we have to do, is done through the five organs of action. In human beings, the head is at the top. In animals, the head, the stomach and the lower abdominal organs are all in one straight, horizontal line.

### **What are the five organs of perception?**

Through the eyes, we see the world, through the ears we hear the sounds, and through the nose, we smell different kinds of smells. The tongue is a two-in-one organ, since it is both an organ of perception and an organ of action. On one hand, it perceives taste and on the other, it is used in

speech. The head carries four very important organs of perception – the eyes, ears, nose and tongue. Which is the fifth organ of perception? The skin through which we perceive touch. The sense organ of touch is spread all the through the body unlike the other organs like the eyes, nose etc.

### ***What are the five organs of action?***

The first two are the legs and hands through which we work. We have already seen one organ of action, the tongue. The other organs of action are the reproductive organs and the excretory organs.

### ***What is the mind (manas)?***

Before we try to understand the mind, let us look at an example. If water is stored in a glass, it is called a glass of water, if it is in a bottle, it is called a bottle of water, if it is in a pot it is called a pot of water, if it is in a tank it is called a tank of water. When is water called a river? A continuous, free flowing mass of water bounded by two banks is called a river. If at all the water becomes stagnant, it is not considered a river.

Similarly, the continuous flow of thoughts is called the mind. That is the reason when we are in deep sleep we do not react even to insults because in the deep sleep state the mind ceases to exist. Dare somebody insult us when we are awake? We challenge them because there is a mind to react. When we are in deep sleep, there is no mind; it ceases to exist, meaning that the flow of thoughts has stopped. Therefore, the general definition of mind is the continuous flow of thoughts. Let us look at another definition of mind. The mind is very fluctuating and indecisive. Should I go or not? Should I eat or not? Wherever and whenever there is a thought that is fluctuating, confused, wavering or wobbling, that is trying to decide, yet not decided, that state of thought is called “mind”.

### ***What is the intellect (buddhi)?***

Intellect also consists of thoughts, but there is a functional difference between the mind and

the intellect. They can be compared to isomers, sharing the same molecular formula, but with a functional difference. The essential structure and formatting of both the mind and intellect is the same, both are nothing but thought matter, but there is a functional difference. Whenever there is fluctuation or chanchalatva, that state is the mind, and whenever there is decisiveness, that state is called the intellect. That is the difference between manas (mind) and buddhi (intellect).

There are some more subtle differences between the mind and intellect. When we hear a new word or phrase, we immediately begin scanning our random access memory trying to find a match. However, when we come across a familiar word like sunflower as an example, it immediately strikes a familiar chord in our memory. Different variations of the size, color and shape of sunflowers appear in our understanding. The mind functions in the realm of the known, recognizing familiar objects. How does this happen? The eyes see the form, they communicate the information to the mind, and the mind takes it to the chitta, the memory bank. There a search is performed by name or form, or a combination of both name and form. If we are shown a jasmine and told that it is a sunflower, we search for both the word (name) and shape (form). After going through our memory, which is formed by our past experiences, we come to the conclusion that the form that is being shown to us is a jasmine, not a sunflower. Until this information has been forwarded and processed by the chitta, it is manas, which functions in the realm of the known. Once the information has been processed and matched, the intellect decides that, this is a jasmine. That decisive factor is called the intellect. However, supposing, we come across a word we have never heard before like “gugga-bugayam”, the mind immediately and instantaneously searches the memory bank and returns a negative result, “I do not recognize this”. At the same time, there is a part of us that still tries to figure out what the word could be. That part is the intellect, which

functions in the realm of the unknown also. It is like a search engine that can return results from unknown realms. The mind cannot go beyond the realm of our known experience; the intellect continues the quest into the unknown.

Therefore, we see that we have three beautiful instruments at our disposal – the body, the mind and the intellect. Each one of us is blessed by all three and everybody's mind and intellect is of equal capacity. How much of their potential we can tap into and use is in our hands. Through the organs of perception in the body, we perceive the world of objects. After perceiving the objects, the mind feels different kinds of emotions; the intellect starts thinking so that it can make decisions. Each individual expresses in three different planes. At the grossest level, he is a perceiver of the objects, a little subtler he is a feeler of emotions, and a little subtler still, he is the thinker thinking different kinds of thoughts.

### ***What then makes each individual unique?***

No two people are the same. Even if they are identical twins born to the same mother, they think differently, behave differently, talk differently, walk differently, and like different things. If the mother asks them what they want for breakfast, one may want dosa and the other puri. Where does this difference come from? That difference is indicated in the B-M-I chart by the letter "V". The "V" stands for vasana.

### ***How important are vasanas?***

Every little thing we do in this world leaves its impression on our sub-conscious mind, which is called vasana. All these impressions propel us into a certain way of living. What comes first - the chicken or the egg? Let us not fall into the trap of wondering whether the vasanas were first or the actions were first. We are here, and we have to understand it logically from the standpoint of where we are. We already have many kinds of vasanas or imprints, which propel us to think, act and behave in a certain pattern. Each individual is unique because of his or her vasanas. Each one of

us has the same set of eyes and sees the same world, but the perception is different. These differences in perception are because of the impressions within that make each one of us unique. There may be some good vasanas and some bad vasanas, some good or healthy impressions and some bad or unhealthy impressions. These vasanas in our mind propel the body to perceive the world of objects in a certain fashion alone. They propel the mind to feel certain kinds of emotions in a certain way alone. They push us to think in a certain pattern alone. Each one of us has his or her own way of looking at the world of objects, the world of emotions, the world of thoughts. These different combinations and permutations make each one of us unique.

### ***Do we control the BMI?***

How many of us feel that we have full control over our own BMI? Our condition is like that of a driver with a learner's permit who is in the driver's seat, but does not have adequate control over the steering. Each one of us goes through life, carrying an invisible sign on our front and back that says "L", meaning learning to control my own BMI. If we consider the human mind, we will be surprised to see how much energy is being wasted. Do we get angry? We cannot even begin to imagine how much energy is wasted in ten minutes of intense anger. It is equivalent to the energy spent by a cyclist going uphill with the wind against him for half an hour. The basic problem is the uncontrolled mind, which is sapping all our energy. We can never feel fresh and relaxed with that kind of a mind. Definitely a mistake is being committed somewhere. Where is that? The mind is playing havoc with us. We are losing much of our energy unknowingly because the BMI is not under our control; the sense-organs are not well-regulated.

### ***What is the world of objects?***

In Sanskrit, the world is called prapancha. Why is it called prapancha? There are five basic elements – earth, water, fire, air and space. The various

combinations and permutations of these five elements are being expressed as this world. The world is also called jagat. What is jagat? Jagat also means 'that which comes and goes'! It is ever-changing and therefore nothing in the world is permanent.

### ***What is the world of emotions?***

The world of emotions exists in our mind. Emotions may be positive or negative. The negative emotions have been broadly classified as six vikaras. Vikara is the abnormal nature of the mind. What are the six vikaras (the six inner enemies)?

- 1.kama (lust or selfish desire),
- 2.krodha (anger),
- 3.lobha (greed),
- 4.moha (attachment),
- 5.mada (pride) ,
- 6.matsarya (jealousy).

Kama is lust. Kama is also selfish desire. When desires are not fulfilled, the result is krodha or anger. Supposing desires are fulfilled, for example, for wealth, but if the desire arises for more and more, then what is the result? Lobha or greed. If desires are satisfied, but if our happiness is completely tied to the object of desire, then the result is moha (attachment). If we achieve our desires, and become excessively proud of our accomplishments and look down upon others, the result is mada (excessive pride). If we do not achieve our desires and someone else does, the result is matsarya (jealousy). All of these arise from uncontrolled, poorly regulated and unintelligent desire.

### ***What is the world of thoughts?***

**As you think, so you shall become.** It is the quality of our thoughts that decides the nature of actions. It is the result of our actions that determines our future. We make so many positive resolutions, but we are not able to keep many of them. If we do not respect our own resolutions, how can anyone

else respect us? We must make our thinking a productive endeavour so that our thoughts can be used in a proper fashion. We must also learn to respect our own resolutions.

### ***Can we escape from acting?***

No one who is alive has an option to break free from actions. If we are alive, we have to keep working; we have to keep living, doing something or the other. Act we must. Work we must. We are not given an option or choice. Each one of us when we exist has to express through the body, through the mind, through the intellect. We perceive the objects, feel the emotions or think different kinds of thoughts. We do not have an option of escaping from life. When we think of escaping from life or changing the atmosphere because we are bugged by the present situation, wherever we go, we will have to ultimately face another kind of life wherein we exist again. So act we must. There is no choice of escaping from action. Our understanding of acting or not acting, working or not working, doing or not doing is limited.

Let us expand our understanding a little further. Is there anybody is free of actions? If there is such a person, then he is dead! As long as we are alive, we have to do something or the other; we have no choice but to act. There is no escape from action. Whether we work productively or unproductively, work we must. However, we do have a choice about how we act. How I perceive this world of objects, I have a choice. How I feel the emotions, I have a choice. How I think, I have a choice.

### ***The importance of Awareness***

Once we are convinced that act we must, the next thing that we must understand is that whatever we do, every minute perception, feeling or thought leaves its impression on our subconscious mind. All the minute details of everything we do, feel or think are registered in the subconscious mind. Just as a computer has memory where information is stored, similarly in our chitta,

the memory bank that includes subconscious layers of the mind, all the smallest details of our experiences are recorded. To give an example, it is like the black box in the airplane, which records even the slightest sounds and movements in the cabin. Similarly, this chitta has the capacity to record every movement whether it is at the physical, mental or intellectual level. We have a thought, it is registered. We act, it is registered. We feel something, it is registered. These imprints form a vicious cycle. Let us understand what that cycle is. As they say: Habits die hard. Consider the word, HABIT. Remove the “H” from HABIT, a bit (ABIT) still remains. Remove the “A”, bit (BIT) still remains. Remove the “b”, it (IT) still remains! Everything that we do forms a pattern, an imprint in our sub-consciousness called vasana. When these imprints gain more strength and more power because of habit, they keep propelling us, forcing us, pressuring us to act in the same pattern. By engaging ourselves in positive thoughts and actions, we can transform all over vasanas into positive impressions. For this, we must cultivate awareness in all our thoughts, words and actions.

### **Pancha Kosas: Five Sheaths of a Human Being**

Ancient sages have explored the depths of our being, and given us the knowledge of the Pancha Kosha (five sheaths), that addresses every level of a human being. Just as there is a set of five vessels, one within the other, so also are these Koshas lying one within the other.



Pancha Kosha comprises of:

1. Food sheath (Annamaya Kosha)
2. Vital Breath sheath (Pranamaya Kosha)
3. Mind sheath (Manomaya Kosha)
4. Intellect sheath (Vijnanamaya Kosha)
5. Bliss sheath (Anandamaya Kosha)

#### **1. Annamaya Kosha:**

The outermost of the koshas is called the sheath of food, or Annamaya kosha. This is the gross, physical body made up of matter. Annamaya Kosha is sustained by intake of food. It includes five organs of perception (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch), and the five organs of action (hands, legs, organs of speech, excretion, procreation) at the physical level.

#### **2. Pranamaya Kosha**

Pranamaya Kosha (the vital breath or life force) is the pranic sheath composed of prana, the vital principle or the force that holds together the body and the mind. Its physical manifestation is the breath. As long as this vital principle exists in the organisms, life continues. The Pranamaya Kosha is more subtle than the gross physical sheath. The vital forces of the Pranamaya Kosha perform the different functions of the body, viz., digestion, circulation of blood, respiration etc., and maintain the physical body from within. The whole physical body is pervaded by the Pranamaya sheath. The different limbs of the physical body have their corresponding parts in the Pranamaya Kosha.

#### **3. Manomaya Kosha**

Just as the Annamaya Kosha is made of food-stuff, so also the Manomaya Kosha is formed of mind-stuff. Mind (Manas) is the inner instrument of thinking, feeling and desiring. The Manomaya Kosha is the mental faculty that receives all the sensory inputs and interprets them. This Kosha is much more powerful than the preceding two Koshas and governs them.

#### **4. Vijnanamaya kosha**

Vijnanamaya means composed of vijnana, or intellect (buddhi), the faculty which discriminates,

determines or wills. It is the determinative faculty which guides the mind and comes to right conclusion or determination. When the mind is in a doubting condition whether to do an action or not, Vijnanamaya kosha (intellect) renders help by coming to a determination 'I must do this.' The intellect gives sanction and the mind and the senses work through the gross body. Therefore Vijnana is the decision maker. It is the faculty of intelligence and reasoning.

### **5. Anandamaya kosha**

Anandamaya means composed of ananda or bliss. The Anandamaya kosha is the innermost of the five koshas (sheaths) that veil the Atma. It is associated with the state of dreamless sleep and samadhi. The Anandamaya kosha is the most subtle of the five koshas.

### **Atma (The True Self)**

Behind the five koshas, is the Atma, the True Self. The three divine qualities of the Atma are Sat, Chit and Ananda. Sat means that it is eternal, deathless. Chit means that it is consciousness. Ananda is bliss. The mind of man is in a chaotic state because of his vasanas. As long as there are desires within, the mind helplessly runs in all directions seeking fulfilment of its desires. Consequently it is agitated. An agitated mind cannot concentrate. It is unfit for contemplation and meditation which alone lead him to the eternal bliss of Self-realization. The mind must be withdrawn from its preoccupation with the world at large and directed to the single-pointed thought of the Self within. When the mind is single-pointed, it can be directed towards meditation and realisation of the Atma, the True Self, which is Sat-Chit-Ananda.

## Chapter 5

### India's Scientific System for Personality Refinement

#### Patanjali Muni

Patanjali Muni is the author of the Yoga Sutras. The Yoga Sutras, are a collection of 196 sutras that contain the essence of a school of thought known as Yoga Darsanam, one of the 12 important schools of Indian philosophy. The word sutra literally means “thread”. The sutra literature thus strings together “a thread of thought” on specific given topic. The scholar-sages of ancient India devised the sutra system. Through sutras, what would otherwise comprise an entire book is condensed into a mere few pages, almost like a form of code. However by understanding the code—the expanded meaning of each sutra—one is able to memorize the entire subject by just memorizing the sutras, which can be done relatively easily through regularly chanting them.



#### Astanga yoga: the yoga of eight steps

With millions of people throughout the world becoming more and more interested in hatha-yoga asanas and meditation, Patanjali's system for personality refinement outlined as part of the philosophy is thriving. This system is known as astanga yoga. Not only is the astanga-yoga system practiced to some degree by millions of hatha-yoga practitioners and meditators worldwide, it has also been accepted as a tried-and-true system for personality refinement by other Indian darsanams that are more widely followed today, such as Advaita Vedanta.

In Sanskrit, asta means ‘eight’ and anga literally means ‘limb’. Thus, astanga yoga is an eight-step process. Patanjali presents the astanga-yoga

system in the second chapter of the Yoga Sutras. There, Patanjali says that the eight steps are meant for purification of one's body and mind. He enumerates the steps thus:

*yama-niyamasana-pranayama-pratyahara-dharana-dhyana-samadhayo'stavanangani* | [Yoga Sutra, 2.29]

“The eight steps of yoga are: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi.”

#### Step 1 & 2: Yama & Niyama—the five avoidances & the five observances



The first two steps Patanjali enumerates are yama and niyama. Both of these words come from the Sanskrit root yam, indicating restraint or avoidance. In niyama, the prefix ni indicates opposite meaning.

Thus, yama can be translated as “avoidance,” and niyama as “observance.” In today's language, we can say the “don't-s and do-s.” So, we can see that Patanjali believed that the first step in refining one's personality was to adhere to a basic set of behavioral guidelines—a set of activities to avoid and a set of activities to make a regular part of one's life. Patanjali lists five yamas and five niyamas. Therefore, some modern commentators have even referred to these as “The 10 Commandments of Hinduism.” In essence, what we have with the yamas and niyamas is a basic blueprint for following a dharmic life—10 general dharmas for all humankind to follow. The first step in refining one's personality is to adhere to a very basic guideline of activities in which one would not engage. What are these? He explains in the next sutra:

*ahimsa-satyasteya-brahmacaryaparigraha yamah* |  
[Yoga Sutra, 2.30]

[The yamas are: *ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacarya and aparigraha.*]

### **Yama no. 1: Ahimsa**

The first yama Patanjali enumerates is ahimsa—non-violence. This yama means “avoid violence.” Non-violence is an essential aspect of Indian culture and is considered one of the basic dharmas. As human beings we should all take an inner vow to never intentionally cause anyone harm—not with our actions, nor our words, nor even our thoughts. We often tolerate our mental himsa [violence] because we think it has no negative effect, but if we allow it to go unchecked, eventually it will manifest on the verbal or physical level. As Amma said in her address at the Millennium World Peace Summit in the United Nations General Assembly in New York in 2000, “Simply transferring the world’s nuclear weapons to a museum will not in itself bring about world peace. The nuclear weapons of the mind must first be eliminated.”

Indian culture is based on the understanding of unity—that all of creation is one in essence. If we want to grow as individuals, we must start living according to this sacred truth. Would any sane person intentionally hurt himself? The yama of ahimsa is based on this understanding. If we want to implement the value of ahimsa in our lives, we must observe our own behavior and take note of our violent reactions. The physically violent can try to reduce their responses to the verbal. The verbally violent can try to reduce theirs to the mental. And those of us who find ourselves harboring violent thoughts can try to eradicate even these through various mental-control techniques.

### **Yama no. 2: Satyam**

The next yama is satyam—truth. Again, as this is a yama—an avoidance—we have to convert the word appropriately. Thus, we should avoid asatyam. On its grossest level, this yama can be taken simply as “Don’t tell lies.” It means we should live an honest life—honest to others and honest to our self. However, before speaking truth, we should consider who will be helped and who will be harmed if we speak it. As Amma says,

“Just because someone looks like a monkey, there is no need to go up to him and tell him so.”

Dishonesty has become pandemic—in politics, in business, in social life, even within the family. According to the Indian spiritual tradition, one of the causes behind this is a basic misunderstanding. That misunderstanding is the fallacy that material gain and the prevention of material loss are of greater benefit than spiritual gain and the prevention of spiritual loss. In reality, even an iota of spiritual loss is not worth any amount of material gain, and even the smallest spiritual gain outweighs the greatest material loss. We need to recognize the “value of values.”

When the physical body is being damaged, we have an alarm system to notify us—physical pain. The universe has equipped us with a similar alarm system for our mind—the prick of conscience. When we violate basic dharmas such as ahimsa, satyam and the other yamas, we experience the stab of guilt. This sensation is a warning to us to change our behavior—“Alert! Your mind is being damaged!” If we ignore this prick of conscience, it gradually fades. But this does not indicate that we are incurring less spiritual damage. It only means our alarm system is burning out. If we put our hand in fire, the pain causes us to jerk it away. But if we ignore that pain and keep our hand in the fire, the nerve endings will soon be destroyed and we will no longer experience pain. This does not mean the hand is not continuing to be damaged. In fact, soon enough we will not have a hand anymore. It is the same with adharma and the prick of conscience.

### **Yama no. 3: Asteyam**

The third yama is asteyam—non-stealing. The principle of not robbing others is obvious, but we should not limit our understanding of asteyam to surface level. In reality, any unfair transaction is steyam. Cheating in business, refusing to pay for services rendered, and unfair transactions are all examples of steyam. As with all of the yamas, steyam is part of a general code for social harmony. If one is not harmonious with society and nature,

it is impossible for him to be harmonious with himself.

#### **Yama no. 4: Brahmacharya**

The fourth yama is brahmacharya, which means refraining from sexual relations. If the yamas and niyamas are basic general dharmas for all humanity to follow, it seems odd that brahmacharya is included, as it is perfectly within dharma for husband and wife to be physically intimate. Therefore, one should understand this yama as refraining from any relations with the opposite sex that are inappropriate for one's stage in life. Again, it should be remembered that this holds true on not only on the physical level, but also on the verbal and mental levels as well.

In terms of brahmacharya, what is within dharma for someone in ghrasta asrama [married life] is adharma for someone in brahmacharya asrama [student life] or in sannyasa asrama [monk life]. Why is total brahmacharya a student's dharma? Why is it a monk's? To understand this, we only need remind ourselves of the goals associated with these ashramas. A student's life is focused on education, learning, attaining the knowledge that is going to serve him for the rest of his life. During this phase of life if one is involved in a romantic relationship, it is going to seriously hamper the student's ability to focus on his studies. Thus, one aspect of the dharma of total brahmacharya is to help students retain their focus during their education years. Men and women are hormonal creatures. Therefore nothing is more potentially distracting than the opposite sex. It is just a reality that one will be able to focus better without such distractions. Why else does the manager of a cricket team forbid the players from bringing their wives along during important test matches? In all these situations, it is the same logic that is being applied.

It should also be noted that while physical intimacy is within dharma for those who are married, that intimacy should be limited to one's spouse! Furthermore, one should remember that

in the Indian view of life marriage is entered not in order to become mired in desire, but to gradually transcend it. Thus, we can see that brahmacharya is indeed a general dharma, applicable to the entire humanity at one level or another.

#### **Yama no. 5: Aparigraha**

The final yama is aparigraha, which means "non-hoarding" or "non-possessiveness." We should not take more from this universe than what we need. As far as what each individual needs, there is no hard-cut rule. We have to introspect and let our conscience guide us. But in general we should try to set limits for ourselves and adhere to them. In today's world, we often think that the more one has, the greater he is, but according to Indian thought, all possessions are in fact a form of crutch. When we see possessions in this light, who is stronger: the man in the wheelchair, the man with crutches, the man with a cane or the man who can walk freely without an external aid?

In fact, limiting our possessions is not enough. We also should be careful not to develop a sense of possessiveness with our possessions. We should always remember that everything we "own," is in reality just being temporarily loaned to us by God. When the time comes, everything that has been lent to us will be reclaimed—very often without any prior notice! If we practice aparigraha, we will be able to face such moments without any sense of regret. Therefore, practicing aparigraha is to regularly remind one's self that "Everything I own is in fact the Lord's. When He wants it back, I will be ready to give it back with a note of gratitude. Now that we have completed the yamas, we come to the niyamas—the observances. Patañjali enumerates the niyamas thus:

sauca-santosa-tapah-svadhyayeshvara-pranidhanani niyamah | [Yoga Sūtra, 2.32]

"The niyamas are: sauca, santosa, tapah, svadhyayah and isvara pranidhanam."

The yamas—"the don'ts"—are the first step. The niyamas—"the dos"—are the second step. Niyama is considered "more advanced" than yama because

it is relatively easier to avoid prohibited actions than to actively engage in prescribed actions. Thus, niyama is the second anga, and yama, the first.



### Niyama no. 1: Saucam

The first niyama is saucam, which means cleanliness—the importance of physical and environmental hygiene. We should take time to clean the body and our home on a daily basis. Not only is this cleanliness essential for basic health, but an organized environment is also an aid to organized thinking. As Swami Ramakrishnananda writes in *The Timeless Path*: “Not only is uncleanness unhealthy for us and for others, but it also disturbs our mind. When our work area is untidy, we will find that we become easily distracted as well. Conversely, the tidier it is, the more naturally focused our mind. For most people, the mind cannot be organized unless their environment is first.”

### Niyama no. 2: Santosam

The next niyama is santosam, which in this context has the implied meaning mean “contentment with regard to the material possessions one is able to acquire through his efforts, within the confines of dharma.” This is an essential quality that needs to be cultivated if one wants to have

any semblance of peace in life. Contentment comes when we think in terms of all that we have in life, not when we think about all we do not have. We should regularly remind ourselves of all we have been blessed with already in life. Otherwise, we will never know peace. If we do not have the proper attitude, we will always feel dissatisfied in life. We will always feel that we need more. Many millionaires feel they must become billionaires. And many billionaires, feel they must become trillionaires! Abundance is not an exterior condition but an inner mental state. We can have crores, but if we lack a sense of inner abundance we will not feel like we have enough. On the other hand, if our attitude is correct, we can have very little and still feel very rich.

In a series of lectures on Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras delivered by one modern commentator, Swami Paramarthananda, a possible doubt is addressed. He says: “People ask the question, ‘Swamiji, if we are all going to develop contentment, how can the country progress economically? That is why we are poor.’

We should very carefully understand the principle of contentment. There are two things we should differentiate. One is generation of wealth: productivity. By my actions, I can generate wealth. This is one thing. And the second thing is ownership, or possession of wealth. These two are different. Generation is one thing, possession is another. What the scriptures point out is that you need not have contentment at all with regard to the generation of wealth. Generate plenty! Do lot of actions! Produce lots of wealth! It is with regard to what you own and possess that you are to develop contentment. Now, imagine, if I develop plenty of wealth and I am contented with limited ownership, what will happen? If I generate Rs. 1,000, and am satisfied with Rs. 600—that’s enough for me—then the remaining Rs. 400 will be surplus, which I am then willing to share with the society, with my fellow human beings. So, only when there are people who have contentment with their possessions will the nation progress. If there

is no contentment, you may generate Rs. 1,000 per day, but you cannot part with even 1 rupee.” Thus, we see that santosam is not a hindrance to the prosperity of the nation, but a boon to it.

### **Niyama no. 3: Tapah**

The third niyama is tapas, which means “austerities.” With regard to this niyama, Swami Ramakrishnananda writes, “It is only through austerities that we are able to keep our mind and sense organs in control. When we set no limits on ourselves, we become like a child let loose in a candy store. The result is a mess and a sick child. In the same way, when man doesn’t control himself he only winds up harming society and himself.”

In today’s world, freedom is given a lot of importance, but if by freedom we only mean adhering to the mind’s every whim and fancy, we are in fact not really speaking about freedom but about bondage. Occasionally willfully forgoing the things we enjoy in life makes us stronger and freer human beings. I should own the object; it should not own me.

### **Niyama no. 4: Svadhyaya**

Svadhyaya means self-study. This means that we should spend some time every day studying about our “Self”—i.e. reading the teachings of spiritual masters like Amma and core scriptures like the Bhagavad-Gita. If even only for five minutes—just a few pages—we will gradually find our lives enriched and our understanding regarding the world, ourselves and God becoming clearer. In fact, svadhyaya is the foundation of spiritual life because without the spending time with the scriptures and the words of spiritual masters, we cannot even learn the basics of spirituality.

### **Niyama no. 5: Isvara Pranidhanam**

The final niyama is isvara pranidhanam, which means “surrender to the Lord.” In essence, this niyama means performing our actions as karma yoga because it is only through the karma-yoga attitude that we learn to accept all the experiences we undergo in life—both the pleasurable and the

painful—as God’s prasad. Seeing our actions as offerings and their results as prasad helps us to maintain a calm mind. Only a calm mind is capable of rational thinking. Only a rational thinker is capable of learning in life. Thus, the karma-yoga attitude of “Do your best and accept the rest” is an essential aspect of personality refinement, and therefore a key element of Patanjali’s astanga-yoga system.

### **Steps 3 & 4: Asana & Pranayama**

The next two steps—asana and pranayama—have two-fold benefit. On one level, they are excellent methods of creating and maintaining physical health. The saints and sages of India have always proclaimed that, in reality, we are not the body or mind but pure consciousness. However they also tell us that the body is precious and has to be taken care of because if the body breaks down we will be unable to attain any of our goals—be they spiritual or material. A regular hatha-yoga practice can be the foundation of solid health. Pranayama [breath-control exercises] also can help promote and maintain mental and physical virility. However we should remember that the aim behind Patanjali’s astanga-yoga system was to offer humanity a ladder that would allow us to fulfill our birthright of spiritual emancipation. Thus, his primary reason for including the angas of asana and pranayama was because he saw them as important aspects in attaining perfection in meditation. Thus, in Patanjali’s view, yogasanas were primarily aimed at helping one create a body capable of sitting comfortably with a straight spine in meditation.



Similarly, pranayama can also be a helpful step in attaining one-pointed concentration. Ultimately meditation is an internal process: the mind focusing on a single thought without any external support. Patanjali understood how difficult this is. He therefore wanted to provide some “baby steps” to help us gradually build up our concentration power. In hatha yoga, we focus on the movements of the body—a relatively easy form of concentration. In pranayama, the target of our focus becomes slightly more subtle. We are no longer concentrating on the movement of the body, but on the flow of the breath. Pranayama is simply breathing naturally and witnessing the inhalations and exhalations. More complicated forms of pranayama are not necessary.

It should be noted that both hatha yoga and more complicated forms of pranayama are extremely subtle and must be learned directly from a proper and traditional teacher. If practiced improperly, not only will they fail to improve our health, but they can even bring ill-health. Today, some individuals and institutions are teaching very subtle pranayama techniques in large groups to anyone willing to pay the fees. This is extremely dangerous.

### **Steps 5 & 6: Pratyahara & Dharana**

The next two steps in the astanga-yoga system are pratyahara and dharana. Pratyahara means withdrawal of the senses from their sense objects. Before we can meditate—i.e. focus the concentration power on an internal thought—we first have to withdraw the mind from the external world. The problem is that our entire lives are spent in the opposite manner, with the eyes, ears, nose, etc. constantly searching for something in which to revel. Therefore before we can practice meditation, we must practice avoiding sense objects to some degree. We must at least be in control over our sense organs. We should walk the dog; the dog shouldn't walk us. Only once we gain control over the senses to some degree will be to close the eyes and begin the next anga—dharana.



Dharana is focusing the mind on the object we have chosen for our meditation. It can be an image of a form of God, like Devi or Lord Rama. It can be a symbol, like Saligrama, tumeric or the Cross. It can be a saint, like Buddha, Jesus or Amma. Or it can be a sound, like a mantra. Dharana is the anga in which the practice of meditation actually beings.

Concentration can be quite difficult. In fact, some people say one of the best ways to gain humility is to simply to try to meditate because when we see how little control we have over our mind, it will naturally make us humble! But in fact we all have incredible power of concentration. For example, we can watch a two-hour film without blinking or missing a single word. Why then is meditation so difficult? The truth is that anything we like is easier to concentrate upon. If we want to improve our power of concentration in meditation, we must increase our liking for our object of meditation. In order to do this, we must remind ourselves of the benefits of meditation: relaxation, increased concentration power, increased awareness, more creativity, more expansive thinking, spiritual progress, etc. The more we associate our object of meditation with these rewards, the easier it will be for us to concentrate.

### **Steps 7 & 8: Dhyana & Samadhi**

If dharana is the beginning stage of meditation, dhyana is the middle stage and samadhi the final stage. Dhyana is attained when, with effort, we

are able to keep our mind fixed on our object of meditation for a prolonged period of time. In the beginning this takes quite a lot of effort. The mind keeps drifting off, and we keep having to catch it and put it back the task we have chosen for it. Continuous success in this effort is called dhyana. Eventually, with practice, the mind stops drifting and we find we are able to concentrate in an unbroken flow. This marks the culmination of astanga yoga: samadhi—complete effortless absorption in the divine.



## Summary

In retrospect, we can say that the first two angas—yama and niyama—focus on refining the moral personality. The second two angas—asana and pranayama—focus on the physical personality. The third two—pratyahara and dharana—on the psychological personality, i.e. learning to control and withdraw the senses and mind. And the fourth two—dhyanam and samadhi—on the spiritual personality, focusing the withdrawn mind towards the divine. Ultimately, Patanjali has outlined a system to help us become masters of our body and mind. Regularly practicing meditation increases our power of concentration, helps us gain in awareness regarding the inner and outer world, and alleviates us of stress, amongst many other benefits. How one uses a mind thus refined is completely up to the individual. A painter may use his refined mind to open up the well of ideas within him and apply them on a canvas. A CEO may use them to manage his company better, make shrewder business moves and relax more deeply on holidays. A soldier may use his refined

mind to maintain mental equipoise in battle. A monk may use his refined mind to contemplate on the nature of his soul. The possibilities are endless and completely up to the practitioner.

## Further reading

1. Raja Yoga by Swami Vivekananda (Ramakrishna Mission)
2. The Timeless Path by Swami Ramakrishnananda (Mata Amritanandamayi Mission Trust)
3. Meditation, Mind & Patanjali's Yoga by Swami Bhaskarananda (Ramakrishna Mission Trust)

## Chapter 6

### The Vedas: An Overview

#### Introduction

The Sanskrit word “vid” means to know. It means knowledge of truth. “Veda” may be termed as the “Book of Knowledge”. The Vedas form the core of our ‘Sanatana Dharma’. The Vedas constitute the root of dharma, says Manu. The Vedas are the most ancient scriptures of humanity. Since there are many mantras in the Vedas associated with various seers, we think that they were composed by them. The rishis are called “Mantra-drastas”, those who “saw” the mantras, not those who created the mantras. “Seeing” or “looking” does not denote merely what is perceived by the eye. It is a term that covers a variety of perceptions and experiences. When the sages were meditating, the mantras of the Vedas appeared to them in a flash in their hearts and in the inner recesses of their minds.

When we say that Columbus discovered America, we do not mean that he created the continent: we mean that he merely made the continent known to the world. In the same way the laws attributed to Newton, Einstein and so on were not created by them. Scientists perceived the laws of Nature and revealed them to the world. Similarly, the seers discovered the Mantras and made a gift of them to the world.

The Vedas are called “Sruti.” That which is heard is Sruti. “Srotra” means the “ear”. The Vedas have been handed down orally from generation to generation and have not been taught or learned from any written text. That is how they got the name of “Sruti”. The Vedas have been preserved with the utmost care as the mantras are most efficacious only if each syllable is chanted with precision so far as its sound and textual correctness are concerned.

The remarkable thing about the Vedas is that they are of immeasurable value as much for their sound as for their verbal content. While the sound

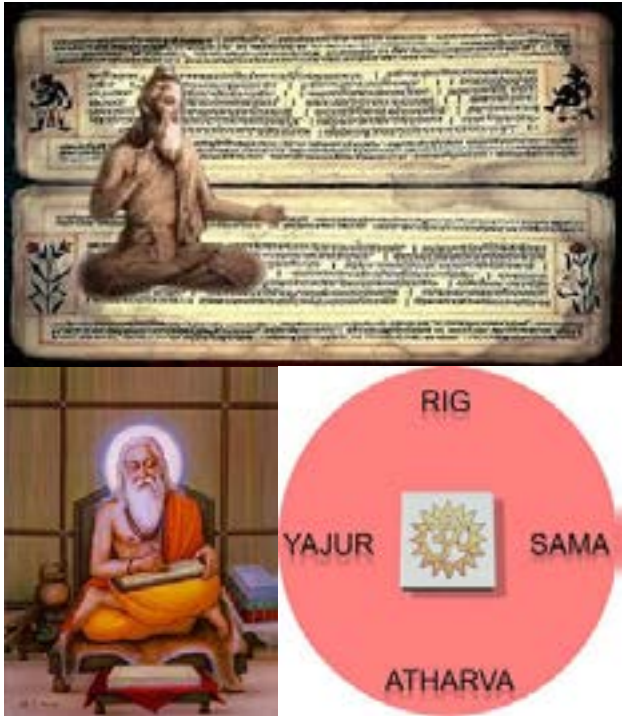
has its creative power, the words are notable for the exalted character of the meaning they convey, and the lofty truths that find expression in the mantras. The tenets of these scriptures have aroused the wonder of the people of other lands. They are moved by the poetic beauty of the hymns, the subtle manner in which principles of social life are dealt with them, the metaphysical truths embedded and expounded in them, and the moral instruction as well as scientific truths contained in them.

Each Vedic hymn is equal to several self-improvement books. The Vedic hymns are full of positive thoughts. Through auto-suggestion, it leads to inner transformation that enables one to reach one’s highest potential. Each hymn gives positive energy to those who chant, to those who hear and those who contemplate on them. You don’t need to read any book written by Norman Vincent Peale or Robin Sharma on the power of positive thinking. When Vedic hymns are chanted every day, the whole atmosphere will be surcharged with tremendous energy and positive thoughts. That is why ancient Indian kings appointed Vedic priests in every town, temple and palace who repeated the positive words million times and prayed for the welfare of not only human beings but all of life. This is the highest stage of human thought.

#### The Four Vedas

The great sage Vyaasa, (also known as Veda Vyaasa) compiled the four Vedas: The Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Saama Veda and Atharvana Veda. The Rig Veda is wholly in form of hymns in praise of various “devatas”-aspects of God as manifested in nature. The Vedic thought does not compartmentalize God and nature-all nature and all things are divine. As Amma says “One Truth shines through all of creation; rivers and

mountains, plants and animals, the sun, the moon and all the stars, you and I all are expressions of this one Reality. When you behold everything as God, your whole life becomes an act of worship, a form of prayer, a song of praise.”



All the Vedas, as available today contains 20,500 mantras (verses). Our college prayer, that we say every day, is nothing but verses taken from the Vedas, and characteristic of all Vedic verses, they have universal appeal and timeless relevance. For example, the verse “Asatoma Sadgamaya” (Lead me from Untruth to Truth) is taken from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (Brihad means huge, and Aranyaka means forest, and Brihadaranyaka literally means a huge forest of philosophy).

### Rig Veda

The word “Rik” means “A Hymn in Praise”. The Rig Veda has been assigned the first place among the Vedas, because the actions or rituals that the Yajur Veda talks about, and the musical rendition of the Sama Veda emerge from the basic “riks” of the Rig Veda. The Rig Veda has more than 1000 ‘riks’. Very often, there are several levels of meaning to the Vedic terms. Which is why, a surface reading of the Vedas may not give you the

exact meaning. To understand the deeper levels of meanings, we have to contemplate deeply with a clear mind.



For example, the word “Agni” generally means fire. Well, firstly, it means, the physical fire, secondly it also refers to the “devata” Agni – the energy of fire, and finally it also has the subtle inner meaning of the “light of consciousness” and the glow of the soul’s awakening of wisdom. Since the Rig Veda starts with a verse on Agni and ends with a verse on Agni, many think it is a work on fire worship. Not so. It is a work not only worshipping the external fire, but also worshipping and invoking the “Inner Fire”, the fire of wisdom, the light of wisdom that burns the “darkness” of ignorance to ashes. These are verses of lofty ideals, not just a fire worshipping ritual, but a profound philosophy.

### Yajur Veda

The word “Yajus” is derived from the root “yaj” which means worship. The word “yajna” or sacrificial worship is also derived from it. Just as the word “Rik” means “A Hymn in Praise”, the word “Yajus” describes the ritualistic procedure of the Yajnas. The Yajur Veda has two main branches – “Shukla Yajur Veda” and “Krishna Yajurveda”. Yajur Veda is famous for its presentations of various Vedic rituals. The famous Yajnas like Ashwamedha and Rajasuya are made known to us in detail in the Yajur Veda.

Rig Veda helps in chanting the praise by hymns, whereas the Yajur Veda helps in actual

performance of rituals using these hymns. The famous “Rudram” which is chanted in many temples across India in praise of Lord Shiva, comes from the Yajur Veda.



### Saama Veda

Saama means to bring Shanti or peace to the mind. The Riks are set to music in the Saamaveda. Even though the mantras chanted are often the same as that of the Rig Veda, they are chanted in a musical scale, thus making the Saama Veda the basis and source of the seven swaraas or notes fundamental to Indian Classical Music. In the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna says “Among the Vedas, I am Saama Veda”.



### Atharva Veda

The Atharva Veda was brought to light by the Rishi Atharva. The Veda contains many mantras meant to ward off evils and hardships. It also contains many hymns dealing with creation. Bhumi Sukta

(Ode to Earth) in the Atharva Veda is a beautiful poem with 63 verses; it is a priceless contribution of Atharva Veda to the Vedic literature; this poetry is universal and reveres the earth as mother. It is the pinnacle of environmental awareness and reverence to the motherland, composed several thousand years ago.



A verse in the Bhumi Sukta says: “You are my mother. I am the son of the earth. In this land the Vedas are revered in every direction. Wonderful are the words of wisdom that have been uttered in this land. O my Motherland! May all of us be gifted with sweet speech. May we live together in harmony. May trees and plants grow on you in abundance.”

### Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads

Each Veda has four parts:

- Samhitas
- Brahmanas
- Aranyakas
- Upanishads

The Samhita portion is the main text of the Veda. Brahmanas serve the purpose of a guidebook or handy manual that explain the proper use of the mantras contained in the Samhita. The word ‘aranya’ means ‘forest’. After attaining mental purity through the performance of actions or rituals, one graduates to the study of the Aranyakas, in the quietness of a forest like

atmosphere, which lead further to the Knowledge portion of the Vedas.

The Knowledge portion of the Vedas, that deal profound questions on life and death are called Upanishads. All the Vedic rituals are not only meant for worldly gains, but also for disciplining the mind and attaining mental purity. On attainment of this mental purity, the practitioner becomes ready for the study of the Upanishads and to meditate on the ultimate reality. If the Samhita is the tree, then the Brahmanas is the flowers, Aranyakas are the unripe fruits, and the Upanishads are the final ripened fruits. Thus the Vedas are comprehensive and cover the three aspects of Karma Kanda (Work), Upasana Kanda (Worship) and Jnana Kanda (Wisdom).

### The Six Vedangas

The Sanskrit word 'Vedanga' literally means 'limb of the Vedas'. Even though the Vedanga literature does not form a direct portion of the Vedas, these disciplines are complementary for the proper understanding of the Vedic text. The Vedangas are six in number: Siksha, Vyakarana, Chandas, Nirukta, Jyotisha and Kalpa.



### Siksha (Phonetics)

Siksha is defined as 'that by which one is taught'. Siksha refers to the text dealing with instruction on phonetics. These texts explain the rules of proper pronunciation of the Vedic mantras. Since the Vedas employ words as a means of knowledge the words must reveal the meaning as intended by the Vedas. Any alteration in the pronunciation of a word or its accent, swara; changes the meaning of the word, which can alter the message communicated by the sentence.

Therefore great care was taken to evolve a system of phonetics that would protect the meaning of the word as intended by the Vedas. There are numerous scholarly siksha texts containing rules of pronunciation. The two most comprehensive compilations are by Panini and Yajnavalkya.

### Vyakarana (Grammar)

Vyakarana is the study of grammar. Sanskrit has a grammatical frame work for forming varieties of compounds and nominal derivatives. A comprehensive work known as 'Ashtadhyayi' was written by Panini, in sixth century B.C. Panini's grammar provides 4,000 rules that describe the Sanskrit of his day completely. This grammar is acknowledged to be one of the greatest intellectual achievements of all time. The great variety of language mirrors, in many ways, the complexity of nature. Success in describing a language is as impressive as a complete theory of physics. Scholars have shown that the grammar of Panini represents a universal grammatical and computing system. From this perspective it anticipates the logical framework of modern computers.

### Chandas (Prosody)

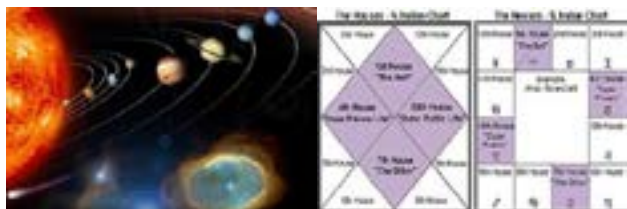
Chandas refers to the meters (syllable count) in the Sanskrit language. The Vedas are also known as chandas because most of the mantras in the Vedas are in a meter form. Every metric composition generally has four padas or quarters and each pada in a given meter has a specific number of aksharas, syllables, each with a defined length, matra.

### Nirukta (Etymology)

Yaska is the author of the Nirukta, a technical treatise on etymology, lexical category and the semantics of Sanskrit words. Nirukta explains how certain words get to have their meanings, especially in the context of interpreting the Vedic texts. It includes a system of rules for forming words from roots, prefixes and suffixes, and formed the basis for later dictionaries. The

etymology of Vedic words is traced by identifying the phonetic and semantic history and evolution of a word. Words in Sanskrit are typically formed by having appropriate suffixes and prefixes to a particular root. Consider for example the root word 'vid' which mean 'to know'. From this root, we have several words such as vidya (knowledge), avidya (ignorance), vidyarthi (student), vidyapeetham (university). Contrast this with the English language where the words - knowledge, ignorance, student and university have not much in common. New words can be formed in Sanskrit using the rules of etymology.

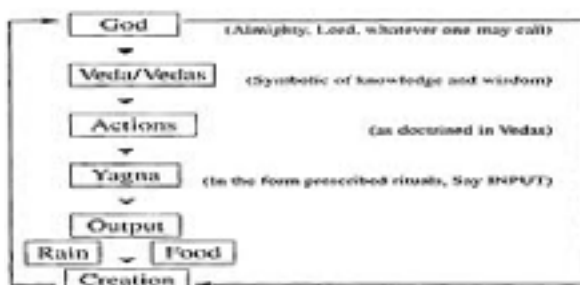
### Jyotisha (Astronomy and Astrology)



Jyotisha helps one determine the position of planets and stars at any time. A Vedic ritual should be performed only at the time of certain planetary configuration. Jyotisha enables the Vedic rituals to be performed at the most propitious time. Jyotisha is used even today to check the compatibility of a proposed matrimonial alliance and decide the auspicious time of important ceremonies. These treatises reveal a great depth of knowledge in astronomy.

### Kalpa (Know-how of Rituals)

The Kalpa Sutras deal with the specific procedures for performing rituals including such details as to the mantras to be chanted and the kinds of materials to be offered during the various rituals.



### Conclusion

The seven main concepts of Vedic Indian culture are:

1. One, all-pervasive Supreme Being who may be worshipped through any form.
2. Dharma, that which sustains the universe: an all-encompassing term representing divine law, path of righteousness, duty, responsibility, virtue, justice, goodness and truth.
3. The Universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.
4. Karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.
5. The soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until the peace and bliss of moksha (liberation from the cycle of rebirth) is attained through knowledge of the Absolute Reality.
6. The belief that no religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine paths are facets of God's Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.
7. An enlightened master, or Satguru, who is essential for gaining knowledge of the Absolute Reality.

*Let us conclude this chapter with a few quotes from eminent philosophers, thinkers and writers:*

"In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life; and it will be the solace of my death. They are the product of the highest wisdom." - **Arthur Schopenhauer (German Philosopher)**.

"The Veda was the most precious gift for which the West had ever been indebted to the East." - **Voltaire (French Philosopher)**

"Indian philosophers' subtleties make most of the great European philosophers look like schoolboys." - **T. S. Eliot (American Writer)**

"There is space in its philosophy for everyone which is one reason why India is a home to

every single religion in the world.” - **H. G. Wells**  
(**English Writer**)

“This is another great theme of the Vedanta, this oneness of life, this oneness of everything ... separation does not exist, it is not real. It is merely apparent, the limitations imposed by the five instruments of knowledge man is bound with – the five sensory organs. In the heart of things, there is Unity still.” – **Swami Vivekananda**

“Moral and spiritual values are the factors which give strength, integrity and unity to a nation. When that is gone, the nation also falls apart. India’s culture is spirituality. The origin of spirituality, though it is beginningless, to speak in empirical terms, is the Vedas. Therefore, to preserve, protect and spread the Vedic dharma is equal to preserving, protecting and spreading the moral and spiritual values of the country which will help to uplift and unify its people. This alone will protect the country from a great downfall.” – **Amma**

## Chapter 7

### One God, Many Forms

Our scriptures are a unique blend of the subtle philosophy on one hand and simple worship on the other. There are many gods and goddesses, rituals and festivals, ceremonies and celebrations. The Vedas authoritatively proclaim that the Reality is one and one alone. Why then do we have so many gods? Our religion is not polytheistic. The different gods and goddesses represent the powers and functions of the one supreme God (Brahman). God is the real Self in all beings, the Atman. The images of our deities each manifest, in their visible forms, particular aspects of One, Supreme God, who is omniscient (all-knowing), omnipresent (all-pervading) and omnipotent (all-powerful). Divine incarnations such as Sri Rama and Sri Krishna are also manifestations of One God.

The philosophical and spiritual truths are ingeniously presented in the form of symbols. Symbolism plays an important role in life. Even language which man uses for communicating ideas is symbolic in character. In India, symbols have always been used as powerful representations of the higher reality. The link between the worlds, the outer and the inner, the lower and the higher, is through the language of symbols presented by great sages and saints who have attained God-realization. The art of god-symbolism is helpful in two ways: Firstly, the symbols help to maintain the ancient culture and heritage. Secondly, the understanding of the inner significance of the symbols establishes a greater conviction of the Truth that they represent. The knowledge of the inherent symbolism gives deep inner meaning to the different forms of worship. This chapter is meant as an initiation into learning the art of decoding the symbolic meanings. It is by no means exhaustive. In our culture, it is understood that God can manifest in any form and therefore the choice of favourite diety (ishta devata) is left to each individual. A few examples of the

more popular deities have been taken and their philosophical significance explained. It should give us an insight into the deep truths represented by these forms and unearth the treasures of our Vedic heritage.

#### Ganesha



Ganesha has a human form with an elephant's head. An elephant's head on a human body is meant to represent supreme wisdom. The large ears of Ganesha indicate the importance of 'listening' to gain wisdom in life. The trunk which

springs from his head represents the intellect, the faculty of discrimination which arises out of wisdom. The trunk of an elephant has the unique capacity of performing both gross and subtle activities. A trunk can uproot a tree. It can pick up a needle from the ground. The trunk represents the intellect which can penetrate the realms of both the material and spiritual world and this is the state which man must aspire to reach.

A perfect man is not swayed by likes and dislikes, pleasant and unpleasant happenings, good and bad environment. In other words, he is not influenced by the pairs of opposites existing in this world. Ganesha's large belly conveys that he can consume and digest whatever experiences he undergoes. At the feet of Lord Ganesha is spread an abundance of food. Food represents material wealth, power and prosperity. Beside the food is a tiny rat looking up towards Ganesha. The rat does not touch the food but waits for the master's sanction to eat. The rat represents desire. The rat looking up therefore denotes that the desires in a perfect man are absolutely under control.

Ganesha has four arms. The four arms represent the four inner equipments of the subtle body, namely

manas (mind), buddhi (intellect), ahankara (ego) and chitta (conditioned-consciousness). Ganesha represents the pure Consciousness, 'I', the Atman which enables these four equipments to function. In one hand he holds an axe and in another a rope. The axe symbolises the destruction of all vasanas (negative tendencies). The rope is meant to pull man from his worldly entanglements and bind him to the everlasting bliss of his own Self. In the third hand he holds a modaka (a sweet). Modaka represents the joyous rewards of spiritual seeking. In the fourth hand he holds a lotus. The lotus represents the supreme goal of human evolution. By holding the lotus in his hand he draws the attention of all seekers to that supreme state that each one of us can aspire for and reach through proper spiritual practices.

### Subramanya



Subramanya like other gods is a picture of human perfection. Through symbolism, he indicates ways and means to reach that perfection. He is known also as Kartikeya and Sanmukha. Subramanya holds a spear in his hand. Most Hindu gods wield weapons of destruction. Siva holds the trident, trisula. Vishnu carries a discus, cakra. Rama carries a bow. These weapons are meant to attack, to destroy vasanas, negative tendencies within oneself. It is only by the destruction of vasanas that we attain our divine state. Our vasanas are the impurities covering divinity within us. Man minus vasanas is God. God plus vasanas is man. With the spear, Subramanya destroys all vasanas. The peacock is the vehicle of Subramanya. The peacock is the enemy of the serpent. It is seen clutching the serpent with its claws. The serpent is not killed but held in captivity. This symbolises complete control over the ego. When the ego is held firm and the desires are kept under perfect control, man gains mastery over the mind and reaches perfection.

### Siva



Lord Siva is the personification of absolute, infinite, blissful consciousness, beyond birth and death, beyond time and space. Lord Siva sits in a meditative pose against the white background of the snow-capped Himalayas in Mount Kailasa. His posture symbolises perfect inner harmony and poise, experienced by a Man-of-Realisation. He is rooted in God-consciousness. He revels in the bliss of the transcendental Reality. Nothing disturbs him. The vicissitudes of nature, the challenges of life, the trials and tribulations of the terrestrial world do not affect him at all. He maintains perfect serenity, equanimity and tranquillity in all environments and circumstances.

The snow-white background symbolises the absolute purity of mind. When the mind is disturbed, agitated you do not see the divinity in you. Recognising your divine Self is like seeing a reflection in a pool of water. When the water is dirty or disturbed you cannot see your own reflection. Only when the water is clear and steady do you recognise your reflection. Similarly, the divinity in you is lost in a pool of thoughts. If the thoughts are tamasic (dirty) or rajasic (agitated) you miss your divine Self. By spiritual practices you ought to raise your personality, from its tamasic and rajasic states to the state of sattva. In the sattvic state, when the mind is absolutely pure and steady you recognise your supreme Self. That is the state of Siva in Kailasa.

Lord Siva not only represents the supreme state of perfection in man but in his very pose indicates the way to reach it as well. Siva has his eyes half-closed, that is neither fully closed nor fully open. Closing the eyes completely would mean that the individual has shut out the world. He is not at all in this world. Opening the eyes fully would mean that he is totally involved in this world. Half-closed eyes therefore signify that his mind is absorbed in the inner Self while his body is engaged in the outer world. One aspect of his personality is ever-rooted in God-consciousness while the other is dealing with his worldly duties and responsibilities. He conducts himself in this world like an actor does on the stage. An actor plays various roles but in truth he has nothing to do with them. He retains his real identity throughout the play and merely acts the scenes detachedly. So is the man of Realization in this world. Ever-rooted in Atmic Consciousness, he goes about in the world like any other man.

The state of meditation shown in Siva's posture is again symbolic. Meditation is the final gateway to Self-realisation. To attain the state of Godhood you need to meditate. However, in order to meditate successfully you must possess a pure mind. To develop a pure mind you need to work with detachment in this world. The process of self-development first necessitates selfless dedicated actions, karma. By such karma your ego and egocentric desires fall away. In the process your mind gets purified. Such a man is brought to the state of meditation. Through meditation you realise your supreme Self. All that is suggested in the pose of Lord Siva sitting in Kailasa amidst snow-capped mountains.

Siva is said to have a third eye known as jnana chaksu. Jnana chaksu literally means eye of wisdom. The eye whose vision reaches beyond that of the two mortal eyes. The idea of the third eye is not to be taken literally to mean that a third fleshy organ exists in Siva. It only means that Siva has a divine vision of Reality. When you transcend the limitations of your body, mind and intellect

you gain realisation of your inner Self. That is indicated by the opening of the Jnana chaksu. The same ego that has degraded you into a limited existence now 'adorns' your personality. This idea is indicated by Siva coiling the serpent around his neck. Siva, the Lord of destruction, has a trisula (trident) in hand. The trisula is a three-pronged weapon. This weapon symbolises the destruction of ignorance, doubts and incorrect knowledge. Shiva is wedded to Shakti, which represents the power to destroy the inner enemies that stand in the way attaining Self-knowledge.

Shiva is also portrayed as Nataraja, the lord of dance. The scientist Fritjof Capra writes in his famous book 'Tao of Physics': "Shiva, the Cosmic Dancer, is perhaps the most perfect personification of the dynamic universe. Through his dance, Shiva sustains the manifold phenomena in the world, unifying all things by immersing them in his rhythm and making them participate in the dance – a magnificent image of the dynamic unity of the universe."



## Vishnu

In the Vishnu Purana, Sage Vyasa refers to Vishnu as the supreme all-pervading Reality, the Reality which is the substratum of the microcosm and macrocosm. The blue colour of Vishnu indicates His infinite stature. Blue is associated with the infinite since immeasurable sky appears blue in colour. The Atman is the core of the

human personality. The Lord is the Atman which manifests Itself through body, mind and intellect as the individual. The same Lord pervades the entire cosmos as Brahman.



The picture of Vishnu lying on the serpent-bed in the milky ocean suggests the means of recognising the Atman, the innermost core of man's personality. The ocean is the mind with its infinite thoughts. The milky ocean stands for the

satvic mind. A satvic mind is pure and serene. It is the highest quality of the mind. The other two states of the mind are rajasic and tamasic. The rajasic mind is ever agitated. Tamasic is dull. When the mind is in the latter two states man gets involved in the mundane world. Only the satvic mind lifts man to the higher realm of Divinity. In a satvic mind alone can man recognise his divinity.

The serpent is the ego with its many desires. In a satvic mind the ego is turned inward. An extroverted ego loses sight of the Divinity within. When the same ego turns its attention inward, when its concentration is upon the inner Self instead of the outer objects of the world it recognises the supreme Self, Atman. The thousand heads of the serpent turning inward indicate that the thoughts are directed to single-pointed concentration and meditation upon the Atman. When man holds his mind thus in deep meditation upon his supreme Self he realises Vishnu, the all-pervading Reality. Vishnu is the one eternal, unmanifest Reality. Brahma, the creator of the world is shown as emerging from the navel of Vishnu while he is lying on the serpent-bed. This shows the idea of the manifested world created from the unmanifest Reality. Vishnu represents the power of sustenance. Vishnu is wedded to Lakshmi the goddess of wealth. The significance is that sustenance or maintenance involves wealth. In order to maintain anything, the maintainer must necessarily possess wealth.

## Brahma

Brahma, Vishnu and Siva constitute the Hindu Trinity. Brahma is the god of creation. An individual's subtle body is constituted of his mind and intellect, that is, his entire thoughts. Thoughts are responsible for the type of world that the individual experiences around him. As the thoughts, so the world. If a man possesses good thoughts, he sees a good world. If his thoughts are bad, he sees a bad world. Yudhisthira, a virtuous man, saw virtue everywhere. While Duryodhana, a vicious man, saw vice everywhere. When thoughts are absent there is no world at all. In



deep-sleep, there are no thoughts, no world. This phenomenon is true not only of the microcosm but of the macrocosm as well. The cosmic subtle body is the aggregate of all subtle bodies of all living beings. The cosmic subtle body, called Hiranyagarbha, is said to be the creator of the entire universe. This creator is Brahma.

The four faces of Brahma represent the four Vedas. They also represent the four ways in which thoughts function in the antahkarana (inner personality). The four ways in which thoughts function are: manas (mind), buddhi (intellect), ahankara (ego) and chitta (conditioned-consciousness). These are the manifestations of the unmanifest Consciousness.

Brahma is said to be the Lord of creation. The creator must necessarily possess the knowledge

to create. Without knowledge no creation is possible. Hence Brahma is said to be wedded to the goddess of knowledge, Sarasvati. Life in this world is a manifestation of the three principles of creation, sustenance and destruction. In fact these three are interconnected. The apparent destruction is only an essential forerunner to creation. Destruction and creation go hand in hand. The destruction of childhood is the creation of youth and the destruction of youth the creation of middle age. In this process of birth and death the individual is maintained. Hence, the three gods of the Trinity viz. Brahma, Vishnu and Siva representing creation, maintenance and destruction, are essentially one and the same.

In fact, there are very few temples of Brahma compared to innumerable shrines of Siva and Vishnu existing all over India. This is because the creation of thoughts has hidden the infinite Reality. The attempt of all spiritual seekers is to maintain the state of concentration on the Self and destroy all distracting thoughts until the Reality is revealed. Hence, Vishnu (god of maintenance) and Siva (god of destruction) are worshipped more than Brahma.

### Sarasvati



The Vedic tradition of India from time immemorial has given women the highest place of respect and recognition. The Hindu scriptures are referred to as Mother Sruti and the Bhagavad Gita as Mother Gita. Knowledge itself has been personified as a feminine deity — the Goddess Sarasvati. The goddess Sarasvati is represented as sitting on a lotus. She holds the sacred scripture in one hand and a lotus in the other. With the third and fourth hands she plays the veena.

The seat of the lotus indicates that the goddess is firmly established in the experience of the supreme Reality. She is rooted in Truth which the lotus represents. By holding the lotus in her hand

Sarasvati indicates to man the supreme Goal that he should reach in his lifetime, the goal of Self-realisation. The path of that goal is shown by her other hands. There are two distinct paths taking man to the highest experience, Godhood — the path of knowledge and the path of devotion.

The path of knowledge is shown by the goddess holding the sacred book. It is called jnana marga in Sanskrit. It expounds Vedanta, the philosophy of the Vedas. It is a systematic and scientific presentation of the realities of life. It explains the various layers of matter that man possesses and the core of Reality that lies beneath them. By careful study and reflection the seeker unravels the mystery of his inner life until he reaches the core of his supreme Self. This path is meant for the intellectuals.

The path of devotion is called bhakti marga. This path also leads to the goal of Self-realisation. This is meant for those who are predominantly devotional, who use their heart to sing praises of their Lord. Through music, kirtans or bhajans they maintain a single-pointed devotion to the Lord and thereby attain Godhood. This is indicated by Sarasvati playing the veena.

### Lakshmi



Lakshmi pours out riches to the community. Where there is Lakshmi there is prosperity. Wealth here also includes moral and ethical values, the nobler aspects of life, the power of the mind and intellect. This kind of wealth has to be acquired by a seeker before his initiation into spiritual knowledge.

Wealth however does not come to a person by merely begging at the feet of Lakshmi. Man does not realise that when he runs after wealth it moves away from him. The way to command wealth is to leave it alone and to seek the higher values of life. This idea is well-brought out in the allegory of the churning of the milky ocean. The ocean of

milk represents a sattvic pure mind. When man contemplates with a pure mind on the higher ideals of life he evolves spiritually. By gradual evolution he reaches the goal of Perfection. A man of Perfection gains everything in the world. He commands peace, power and prosperity. Wealth is at his feet. This is the way to gain wealth, to win over Lakshmi. Lakshmi emerging by the churning of the milky ocean symbolises this truth.

### Parvati

Parvati is the consort of Lord Siva. Parvati is also known as Uma. Parvati is also referred to as Annapurni which means 'bestower of food'. Anna means 'food', which is to be taken in a wider connotation to mean food for all sense organs i.e. all sense-objects. The other forms of Parvati are Durga and Kali which are awesome and terrifying. As Durga, the goddess rides a lion, wields a number of weapons, As Kali, the goddess wears a garland of skulls and holds a severed head in one hand. All these represent destruction of evil and protection of good.



Man at present is riddled with innumerable desires, agitations and sufferings. He is tormented by his own negative thoughts and feelings such as selfishness, jealousy, hatred, greed etc. These are the greatest enemies in man which loot his inner peace and bliss. They have to be totally annihilated for man to reach the abode of everlasting happiness. This goddess is therefore invoked by the seeker to destroy all his vasanas (negative tendencies) and unveil his supreme Self.

### The Devas

When a company executive goes to his office, he puts on his suit. But when he sits for puja in

his house he wears a traditional dress. Thus, ordinary mortals that we are, we change the dress according to the work that we do at the moment. Similarly, the omnipotent God changes His form also according to his functions. But the difference between Him and us is this. At different times we put on different kinds of dress. But God who is omnipotent, is engaged at the same time in various kinds of work, and appears differently at one and the same moment.



The government has an army, a navy and an air force to protect the nation. So too does God have the army of devas to protect the Universe. In our government, in addition to the military personnel, there are officers in charge of irrigation, public works, transport, and the like. Similarly, in God's Kingdom, Varuna is in charge of water supplies, Agni is in charge of fire and adapts it to the needs of men, Vayu adapts air to human needs. Thus there are many devas. The lord of them all is Indra. God, who resides in us, also resides in the devas. There are many people who are not aware of the presence of God in themselves. So too, many among the devas do not know of the Supreme God. If we engage in an inquiry into the Atman, at the end of it, it will be clear that God is in us as our very Self.

### Ganga

All our mythological stories have profound meaning which is conveyed in symbolic language. There is a mythological story describing the

descent of river Ganga from the heavens to earth. The origin of the Ganges is said to be in the heavens, where it is known as the goddess, Akasa Ganga. King Bhagiratha prayed to the goddess to descend from the heavens and bless the people of the earth with her prosperity. The prayer was granted. The goddess however warned Bhagiratha that the flow of water from the heavens will be so torrential, that the earth would not be able to bear its force. The only person able to receive such torrential flow being Lord Siva. So Bhagiratha again went into penance and prayer and implored Siva to bear the flow of descent of the waters. Siva agreed. He received the waters of the Akasa Ganga on his head. Siva retired to the jungles for meditation. But the Ganga did not flow on the earth. The king again implored Siva, this time to release the waters of the holy Ganga for the people of the world. As the story goes the Lord granted this prayer as well. The present Ganga is said to be the water flowing out of Siva's head. Therefore, Siva is also known as Gangadhara. Gangadhara literally means the carrier of Ganga (River Ganges).



Strange as the story may sound it has a deep inner significance. Ganga stands for the ultimate Truth, the ultimate Reality, the knowledge of the Atman or Divinity in man. The knowledge of Atman is the state of perfection in man. It is well above the

terrestrial realm of experiences. It is symbolically represented as being located above in the heavens. In order to make the divine knowledge available, the prayers and penance of noble souls is required. This is represented by Bhagiratha. Lord Siva is reputed for his great tapas, contemplation and meditation. Such a man alone can describe the great spiritual truths. The truth so received has to be assimilated and ingrained into your life to bring about your spiritual unfoldment. That state is achieved by your independent reflection and meditation which has been indicated by Siva retiring to the jungles. Having attained

spiritual unfoldment, the knowledge of Truth has to be communicated to the people of the world gradually, carefully. Lord Siva is the Satguru, who teaches the world about the higher reality and destroys ignorance. This idea is beautifully indicated by the release of the Ganga from Siva's head in trickles. Ganga water stands for spiritual wisdom. Hence a dip in the Ganga is considered sacred. When a pilgrim submerges himself in the sacred river it symbolises his union with the supreme Reality.

## Chapter 8

### Bhagavad Gita: The Handbook for Human Life

The Bhagavad Gita is perhaps the most important spiritual document in existence. This is because it condenses the entirety of Indian spirituality into a brief 700 verses. The Bhagavad Gita is not a new philosophy. It presents the essence of the wisdom found in the Upanishads. It was written by Sage Veda Vyasa and is found in the middle of the national epic of India, The Mahabharata—a work of around 100,000 verses.

#### Why study the Bhagavad Gita?

The Bhagavad Gita is the essence of Indian culture. It is pure, distilled wisdom that has the power to transform the individual and uplift our nation. In the very midst of confusing situations, how to train the mind and intellect to evaluate and judge explosive conditions, threatening challenges, and suffocating situations? This know-how is explained exhaustively in the Bhagavad Gita. Therefore the Bhagavad Gita is of crucial importance in rebuilding of our nation and in the rediscovery of our culture.

#### The teachings of The Bhagavad Gita

In fact, the contents of the Gita are so vast that one can dedicate a lifetime to its study. In essence, the entire universe is contained within the Gita's 700 verses: the origin of human suffering; the nature of the soul; the difference between consciousness and matter; the spiritual practices of karma yoga, meditation and jnana yoga; dharma and adharma; the roles of human effort and divine grace; the concept of Avatara; the importance of devotion and its different stages; what happens after death; the importance of cultivating good qualities and shunning bad ones; Self-realization and its rewards; and even the nature of God and how, in fact, it is the Creator that has become the creation.

As previously mentioned, the Gita is a synthesis and condensation of the Vedic teachings, which

are the foundation of Indian culture. Arjuna represents the common man. The battle he is poised to fight represents the battle of life in which every one of must engage. Therefore Krishna's advice to Arjuna is not only for him; it is advice for all of us. When we buy an appliance, it comes with a handbook, informing us how to properly use it. The Bhagavad-Gita is such a handbook: the instruction manual for human life, a guide for successful proper use of the body and mind. At its core are sound and proven methods for finding peace and happiness—not after death, but starting here and now.



#### The Scene at Kurukshetra

The Pandavas had been tricked into thirteen years of exile by a deceitful game of dice. Now, upon their return, they were once again denied their rightful share of the kingdom. All efforts for peace failed as Duryodhana refused to part with even a pin-point of land. The armies of the Kauravas and the Pandavas assembled on the battle-field of Kurukshetra. The Kaurava army was vastly superior in numerical strength and arrayed into a mighty strategic formation by their commander-in-chief, the venerable Bhishma. The Pandavas however had 'Dharma' on their side. Moreover,

Sri Krishna too was on their side. Unarmed though he was, the mere presence of Sri Krishna made all the difference.



Arjuna, who had mastered archery under the tutelage of Dronacharya, was the most highly skilled warrior in the Pandava Army. Sri Krishna himself had taken on the role of the charioteer for the Pandava prince. Arjuna's courage and valour were legendary. He had prepared himself well for this war, and had even obtained celestial weapons through his penance during the years of exile. Arjuna now directs his close friend and charioteer, Sri Krishna, to drive the chariot into the centre of the battlefield so that he may survey the Kaurava army prior to the commencement of the Great War.

### Arjuna's Dilemma

As Arjuna gazes at the faces of grandsire Bheeshma, upon whose knees he had played as a child and his venerable teacher Dronacharya, tears well up in his eyes. Anguish fills his heart at the thought of having to fight against the very people he so dearly loves and respects. Although he is aware of the treachery, greed and immorality of the Kauravas, his mind whirls at the prospect of having to fight with his own kith and kin. Overcome by anguish, right in the middle of the battle-field, Arjuna lays down his bow and arrows and slumps to his chariot-seat in utter confusion. It is at this critical juncture that Arjuna seeks the guidance of Sri Krishna. This is perhaps the turning point of the Mahabharatha War. Let us now look at a few valuable lessons of the Gita.

## 1. Facing the Challenges of Life



When man is plunged into doubt, confusion and despair, the best course of action is to turn to a higher source of wisdom. That is exactly what Arjuna does at the time of this great crisis in his life. Arjuna understands

his utter helplessness—that he simply does not know what to do in this situation. What is right and what is wrong? It is at that moment that he turns to Sri Krishna and seeks his advice with humility. This is a crucial moment, because it marks the moment of transformation in the relationship between Arjuna and Krishna. Previously Arjuna was the master and Sri Krishna the charioteer. Now, Sri Krishna is the master and Arjuna his disciple. Sri Krishna's advice—which comes in the form of a heartfelt and loving conversation between him and Arjuna—comprises the 18 chapters known as The Bhagavad-Gita—The Song of the Lord. The Gita is a book which serves us where we are; whoever we may be, irrespective of place and time, caste and creed, the Gita serves us. This is the special charm of the Bhagavad Gita.

Each of the eighteen chapters of the Bhagavad Gita is called a specific 'Yoga' – a pathway to the Divine. Even the first chapter of the Gita, where Arjuna is expressing his anguish is called Yoga. It is given the name: 'Arjuna Vishadha Yoga' – 'the Yoga of Arjuna's Anguish'. Quite often, man is preoccupied with the mundane matters of everyday life. He attempts to gain a deeper understanding of life only when he is confronted with an agonizing dilemma. This attempt to understand life more deeply is 'Yoga'. Life becomes a problem only when we know not how to meet life's challenges. When that wisdom is revealed to us, when we know the solution, the problem is no more a problem.

## 2. Overcoming Stress

Stress is the reaction to a demanding situation and it can occur at two levels—physical and

psychological. Physical stress is caused by physical causes such as accidents, burns, infections, etc. It is a reaction of the body to face the strain and trauma caused by diverse factors. Psychological stress, on the other hand, is a reaction to mental situations such as fear, anxiety, tension, anger, emotional conflicts, etc.

These situations may be of just a short period but may affect a person for long time leaving deep impressions on his subconscious mind. This could lead to depression or a psychological breakdown. Gita provides valuable guidelines to overcome stress. The battlefield of Kurukshetra, the scene in which Gita was delivered, underlines a point with regard to its relevance in overcoming stress. Just consider this. Even after the war drums have been sounded, the conchs and the trumpets blown, Arjuna is confused, unable to even lift his bow and sinks into depression. This situation has aptly been named as vishada [depression] of Arjuna. What does Sri Krishna advise Arjuna in this context? He tells Arjuna:

How, O Arjuna, has this weakness, neither entertained by honorable men, nor conducive to reaching heaven, and leading to ill fame, come to you at this crisis? || 2:2

Yield not to unmanliness, O Partha, it is not worthy of you; shake off this mean faint-heartedness, arise, O scorcher of foes. || 2:3

Every young person should daily reflect on the essence of these two verses. And their essence is: face life; do not run away from it. Running away from the challenges of life does not solve them. It only weakens the mind and makes it more incapable to face them in future. One should think over it deeply and try to focus on one's strength instead of weaknesses.

### 3. The Path of Action: Karma Yoga

Sri Krishna reveals the principle of Karma Yoga to Arjuna:

*Karmanyeva adhikaaraste maa phaleshu  
kadaachana;*

*Maa karmaphalahetur bhoor maa te  
sangostvakarmani. || 2:47*

*Thy right is to work only, but never to its fruits;  
Let not the*

*fruits of actions be thy motive, nor let thy  
attachment be to inaction.*

*Yogastah kuru karmani sangam tyaktva  
dhananjaya*

*Siddhyasiddhyoh samo bhutva samatvam yoga  
ucyate || 2:48*

*O Dhananjaya, perform actions in the spirit of  
(Karma) Yoga,*

*abandoning attachment, remaining the same to  
gain and loss alike!*

*This equanimity of mind is called yoga.*

This is the fundamental law of action-that we have control over our actions but not over their results. Results are dependent upon a vast network of factors, of which our own actions are but one. Accepting this reality, the karma yogi puts his focus on action and accepts with equanimity, whatever results come.



One of the main practices that Krishna advises Arjuna to apply in his life is that of karma yoga. Karma yoga means 'the yoga of action,' but it does not indicate the performance of any particular action- such as puja or volunteer work etc. Any action can be done as karma yoga-even studying, playing football, doing a technical project and writing an exam. This is because karma yoga is not a particular action but rather a specific mental attitude that can be applied when performing any action.

#### 4. Practicing Karma Yoga

Let's take for an example being interviewed for a job. We can rehearse for the interview for weeks, having a friend ask us typical questions and preparing our answers. We have total control over what clothes and shoes to wear. We can practice our smile in the mirror and work on developing a firm handshake. In the realm of action, we can plan and think and calculate as much as possible. Therefore, more or less, we have complete control. Even after the interviewer poses his questions, we are still in control over what we say.



However, as soon as we speak, we are no longer in control; the action has left us and become subject to the laws of cause-and-affect as dictated by the universal forces. The interviewer may or may not be satisfied with our answers. There may be better qualified candidates. Anything can happen. When we leave the interview room, there is no point in worrying over the results, as we have no control over them. No matter how much we worry, it will not change the interviewer's perceptions of us. Therefore, as Krishna said, we have control over action but not its results. Once we understand this, we will stop worrying about results and shift our focus to perfection in action. Such a person is a karma yogi. He moves forward in life relatively unperturbed, peacefully abiding in the present moment.

The result of the karma-yoga attitude is that we are no longer overjoyed in our success nor depressed by our failures. Our focus is on action and we accept their results with mental composure—be they positive or negative. Aside from the peace of mind, the main benefit of this is that we never lose our rational thinking. When we become

overjoyed in success or depressed in failure, we cannot learn from our mistakes in life. We cannot even learn from our successes. In short, we will not have a mind capable of learning all the important lessons life is trying to teach us. We can control only our action, not the result. So, apply the karma yoga attitude: take care with what you have control over (i.e. action) and accepting when it comes to what you do not (i.e. the results). Not only will this give us mental peace and help us learn from life's lessons, but furthermore, as our attention is not split—half on the action and half on the results—we will actually perform actions more efficiently! When we focus on our action and we are detached from its outcome, we are not anxious about the end product, and we enjoy the process of getting there. When we can focus on the action without being consumed by anxiety over the results, the outcome is excellence in action!

#### 5. The Path of Devotion: Bhakthi Yoga

Compassion for those who are suffering is the essence of devotion. There is an interesting incident in the life of the great saint from Maharashtra, Eknath (1533–1599). Once Eknath was carrying a pot of water from the sacred Ganga, all the way from North India to Rameshwaram, located at the Southern tip of India. He had made a vow to walk the distance of fifteen hundred miles and bathe the Siva Linga at this sacred spot where Sri Rama had worshipped Lord Shiva. As he was nearing his destination after the long pilgrimage, Eknath saw a donkey writhing in agony as it lay dying of thirst. Eknath ran up to it and poured the holy water, without hesitation, into the mouth of the struggling animal. The donkey's eyes shone with gratitude as it revived, but Eknath's companions were aghast at the breaking of the vow, after so long a journey, when it was almost on the verge of successful completion. Eknath however exclaimed in great happiness, "The purpose is realized! Shiva asked and received! Shiva came and accepted!"



In the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna says,

*Adveshtaa sarvabhootaanaam maitrah karuna  
eva cha*

*Nirmamo nirahankarah samaduhkhasukhah  
kshamee || 12:13*

*Santushtah satatam yogee yataatmaa  
dridhanishchayah*

*Mayyarpitamanobuddhir yo madbhaktah sa  
me priyah. || 12:14*

*“He who hates no creature, who is friendly  
and compassionate to all, who is free from  
attachment and egoism, balanced in pleasure  
and pain, and forgiving, ever content, steady in  
meditation, possessed of firm conviction, self-  
controlled, with mind and intellect dedicated to  
Me, he, My devotee, is dear to Me.”*

True devotion expresses itself in compassion for the suffering.

## 6. Gaining Mental Control

Brooding on the objects of the senses, man develops attachment to them; from attachment comes desire; from desire anger sprouts forth. || 2:62

From anger proceeds delusion; from delusion, confused memory; from confused memory, the ruin of reason; thus he perishes. || 2:63

But the disciplined man, moving among sense objects with the senses and mind under control gains tranquility. || 2:64

The above verses show how man falls and how he rises. One of the core spiritual teachings is that, in truth, we are not the mind. The mind is tool for us to use as we transact in the world, just like a computer. The problem is that modern man is not in control of the mind. In the Gita, Krishna explains to Arjuna a number of methods for regaining control of his mind. Mental control is essential if we want to attain success in any field in life. For how can we gain success in the outer world without having first gained success in the inner world?



Many people think that having negative thoughts and desires are not harmful, as thoughts are only in our mind and therefore do not harm anyone. However, Krishna informs us that if we allow negative desires and thoughts to continue, they grow more and more powerful and eventually manifest in our speech and actions.

## 7. The Path of Meditation: Dhyana Yoga

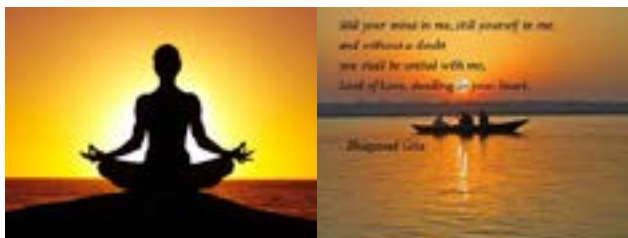
Meditation is the art of mental mastery. Sri Krishna says,

*Asamshayam mahaabaaho mano durnigraham  
chalam;*

*Abhyaasena tu kaunteya vairaagyena cha  
grihyate. || 6:35*

**Undoubtedly, O mighty-armed Arjuna, the mind is difficult to control and restless; but,**

**by practice and by detachment it may be restrained!**



Krishna says, although thoughts cannot be prevented, they can be nipped in the bud. We may not be able to prevent the first thought, but it needs our cooperation in order to continue in our mind. One method of removing negative thinking is simply replacing the negative thought with a positive thought. If we find ourselves dwelling on someone's negative qualities, we can immediately replace this negative thought with a positive one. Another method Krishna recommends is intellectually knocking the negative thought out of our heads, by asking ourselves, "Will this thought really help me? Will it help anyone? Is thinking like this going to help me reach my goal in life?" In order to do this, we first need to cultivate a degree of awareness. For only if we are aware that a negative thought has entered the mind do we have any hope of removing it. Incorporating five to ten minutes of meditation into our lives can help us create this necessary heightened level of awareness.

The daily practice of meditation provides a number of important practical benefits to our body and mind which are scientifically proven. Through the practice of meditation, we gain the ability to face all the challenges of life with the right attitude and a smile.

## **8. Visvarupa Darshanam**

One of the most famous scenes in the Gita takes place in the 11th chapter, which is titled: Vishvarupa Darshana Yoga—The Yoga of the Vision of the Cosmic Form. Here, Arjuna asks Krishna to reveal his cosmic form, and Krishna grants Arjuna that vision. In fact, the real

vishvarupa darshan is nothing more than a clear understanding that it is the Creator that has become the Creation—as Amma says: srstiyum srstavum randalla— 'The creation and the Creator are not two.' It is verily the Lord that has come in the form of the universe.



In fact, Krishna gives this vision to Arjuna as a boon, even though he is not emotionally mature enough for it. As such, when Arjuna comes to understand that God is not only the positive aspects of the universe but also the negative ones he is overcome with fear and begs Krishna to remove the vision, which Krishna does. This shows us that we can never hope to have peace in life as long as we are unable to accept all aspects of life as being a natural part of the God-given universal order. It is a cosmic law that cannot be changed: Where there is birth, there will be death. Where there is growth, there will be decay. Where there is a beginning, there will be an end. Where there is richness, there will be poverty. Where there is good, there will be evil. Where there is success, there will be failure. The universe is comprised of opposites: hot and cold, pleasure and pain, coming together and going apart. The Gita teaches us that we should start learning to accept this reality, as only when we cultivate this understanding and maturity will be at peace with the world around us.

## **9. The Yoga of Wisdom: Jnana Yoga**

In the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna is asking us to turn within and take a look. Deep, unshakable peace comes to us when we gain the awareness of our true nature. God is our own true Self.

Sri Krishna says,

*Aham atmaa gudaakesha  
sarvabhootaashayasthitah;*

*Ahamaadishcha madhyam cha  
bhootaanaamanta eva cha. || 10:20*

*I am the Atma, O Gudakesha, seated in the  
hearts of all beings!*

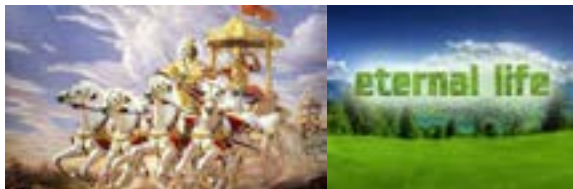
*I am the beginning, the middle and also the end  
of all beings.*

*Nainam chindanti shastraani nainam dahati  
paavakah;*

*Na chainam kledayantyaapo na shoshayati  
maurutah. || 2:23*

*Weapons do not cut the Atma; fire does not  
burn the Atma,*

*Water does not wet the Atma, and wind does  
not dry the Atma.*



The Atma, our innermost essence, is indestructible. The Gita also teaches the highest truth: that the real Self—the Atma—was never born, never grows, never decays nor dies. This is the reality behind all names and forms: sat-cit-ananda—eternal, all-expansive, blissful consciousness. Understanding this is the true source of peace. The external world is ‘asukam’ (filled with sorrow) and ‘anithyam’ (impermanent); that is its nature. At the same time, the Atma is eternally peaceful. Sri Krishna helps Arjuna to understand these great truths and fight the battle of life.

## Conclusion

The Bhagavad Gita begins with the word ‘Dharma’ and ends with the word ‘Mama’. In between these two words are strung together 700 verses as a garland of immortal beauty that indicate exactly what is ‘Mama Dharma’ or ‘My Duty’. The Bhagavad Gita provides a number of pathways to real freedom. Depending on our inclination we can choose the path that is most suited to our temperament. The Gita has universal appeal. It is

never narrow-minded or dogmatic. The teachings are applicable to all human beings regardless of race, religion, creed, language, or nationality. Let us conclude this chapter with a few quotes from eminent philosophers, scientists and writers about the Bhagavad Gita:

“The Bhagavad Gita is the most beautiful philosophical song existing in any known tongue.”  
— **Robert Oppenheimer (American physicist)**

“In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seems puny.” - **Henry David Thoreau (American philosopher)**

“The Bhagavad Gita is perhaps the most systematic statement of the Perennial Philosophy, hence its enduring value not only to India but to all of humanity.” — **Aldous Huxley (English Writer)**

“The marvel of the Bhagavad-Gita is its truly beautiful revelation of life’s wisdom.” - **Herman Hesse (German born, Swiss writer)**

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## Chapter 9

### Examples of Karma Yoga in Modern India

#### 1. Keeping Cool during Twenty-20 ICC World Cup Finals

The first-ever Twenty-20 ICC World Cup was held in South Africa in 2007. In the new format of cricket called Twenty-20, each team gets only 20 overs, and matches tend to be more exciting. India was playing against Pakistan in the finals. The Pakistan team had scored 147 for the fall of 9 wickets. Let us now go over to the stadium. It is the very last over of the game. Pakistan now needs 13 to win from 6 balls with only one wicket remaining. The batsman at the crease is Misbah-ul-Haq. Coming in to bowl is Joginder Sharma, who had only recently found a place in the Indian team. The first ball is a wide. This means one extra run to Pakistan, with the ball not being counted. Joginder is now under tremendous pressure. Mahendra Singh Dhoni, the Indian captain too is under pressure. Did he select the right man to bowl this crucial over? Dhoni walks up to Joginder and speaks briefly. The next ball eludes the bat, and no runs are scored. The next ball is a full toss. Misbah-ul-Haq sends the ball into the stands for a towering six. A huge hit! Pakistan now needs only 6 runs from 4 balls.



The excitement rises to a crescendo as Joginder comes in to bowl! Misbah-ul-Haq is caught by Sreesanth. India win the match by 5 runs and are the Twenty-20 World Champions. Now, what has all this got to do with Karma Yoga? Let us analyze the game. When the first ball was a wide, the pressure was intense on Joginder. It was then that Dhoni spoke to him. Dhoni told him that it did

not matter whether India wins or loses the match. He just advised him to focus on bowling correctly. Why did Dhoni's advice make so much sense? As a bowler, Joginder can only control how he bowls. He cannot decide what stroke the batsman will play. Nor can he decide how the fielders would perform. Only the action is in his hands, not the result of the action. If his mind is anxious about the result, he cannot focus on the action. This is the reason for the first ball being wide. After listening to Dhoni's words, Joginder pulled himself together. He maintained his composure even after being hit for a six. India won the game. The few words spoken by Dhoni had made a vital difference. It is the same in life – whether we are writing an examination or facing a campus interview for our dream job. We can control only our action, not the result.

#### 2. Response to the Mumbai Terror Attack, 2008

A series of twelve coordinated shooting and bombing attacks lasting four days occurred across Mumbai carried out by the terrorist organization, Lashkar-e-Taiba in November 2008. The attacks, which drew widespread global condemnation, began on Wednesday, 26 November and lasted until Saturday, 29 November 2008, killing 164 people and wounding at least 308.



One of the places targeted by the terrorists was the Taj Mumbai hotel. On November 26, 2008, about 35 Taj Mumbai employees, led by a 24-year-old manager, Mallika Jagad, were assigned to manage the event in a second-floor banquet room. Around 9:30 PM, as they served the main course,

they heard what they thought were fireworks at a nearby wedding. In reality, these were the first gunshots from terrorists who were storming the Taj.

The staff quickly realized something was wrong. Mallika Jagad had the doors locked and the lights turned off. She asked everyone to lie down quietly under tables and refrain from using cell phones. The group stayed there all night, listening to the terrorists rampaging through the hotel, hurling grenades, firing automatic weapons, and tearing the place apart. The Taj staff kept calm, according to the guests, and constantly went around offering water and asking people if they needed anything else. Early the next morning, a fire started in the hallway outside, forcing the group to try to climb out the windows. A fire crew spotted them and, with its ladders, helped the trapped people escape quickly. The staff evacuated the guests first, and no casualties resulted. "It was my responsibility....I may have been the youngest person in the room, but I was still doing my job," Mallika Jagad later told one of us.



At 9:30 PM, when the terrorists entered the building, they headed towards one of the restaurants. Forty-eight-year-old Thomas Varghese, the senior waiter at the restaurant, immediately instructed his 50-odd guests to go under the tables, and he directed employees to form a human cordon around them. Four hours later, security men asked Varghese if he could get the guests out of the hotel. He decided to use a spiral staircase near the restaurant to evacuate the customers first and then the hotel staff. Thomas

Varghese insisted that he would be the last man to leave, but he never got out. The terrorists gunned him down as he reached the bottom of the staircase.

When Karambir Singh Kang, the Taj Mumbai's general manager, heard about the attacks, he immediately left the conference he was attending at another Taj property. He took charge at the Taj Mumbai the moment he arrived, supervising the evacuation of guests and coordinating the efforts of firefighters amid the chaos. His wife and two young children were in a sixth-floor room, where the general manager traditionally lives. Karambir Singh thought they would be safe, but when he realized that the terrorists were on the upper floors, he tried to get to his family. It was impossible. By midnight the sixth floor was in flames, and there was no hope of anyone's surviving. Karambir Singh led the rescue efforts until noon the next day. Only then did he call his parents to tell them that the terrorists had killed his wife and children. His father, a retired general, told him, "Son, do your duty. Do not desert your post." Karambir Singh replied, "If the hotel goes down, I will be the last man out."

During the onslaught on the Taj Mumbai, 31 people died and 28 were hurt, but the hotel received only praise the day after. Its guests were overwhelmed by employees' dedication to duty, their desire to protect guests without regard to personal safety, and their quick thinking. The staff rushed people to safe locations such as kitchens and basements. Telephone operators stayed at their posts, alerting guests to lock doors and not step out. Kitchen staff formed human shields to protect guests during evacuation attempts. As many as 11 Taj Mumbai employees laid down their lives while helping between 1,200 and 1,500 guests escape. The heroic response by employees of Taj Hotel during the 26/11 terror attacks on Mumbai in 2008 is taken up as an example for leadership by Harvard Business School. The case study 'Terror at the Taj Bombay: Customer-Centric Leadership' by Harvard Business School

documents the bravery and resourcefulness shown by the employees during the attack.

Another outstanding example of dedication to duty came from the police. Tukaram Omble, Assistant Sub-Inspector of Police, was on the night shift at a police station off Chowpatty in south Mumbai, when a message was received about two gunmen speeding towards Malabar hill after hijacking a vehicle near Marine Drive. The message came after reports of shooting at the Chhatrapati Shivaji rail terminus and hotels like Oberoi and Taj. Tukaram along with his colleagues took up positions near Girgaum Chowpatty to stop the Skoda car. Tukaram only had a baton (stick). The car approached at a high speed, but stopped 50 feet from the barricade. Suddenly, the beam lights went on, and the car swerved towards the barricades. Tukaram was the first to rush out from behind the barricades. He sprang toward one of them, Ajmal Kasab, and gripped the barrel of Kasab's AK47 rifle with both hands. With the barrel pointing towards Tukaram, Kasab pulled the trigger. A spray of bullets entered his stomach and intestine. Tukaram Omble collapsed, but held on to the gun till he breathed his last, stopping Ajmal Kasab from shooting anyone else. He was rushed to a nearby hospital but was declared dead by doctors there. However, thanks to Omble's bravery, Ajmal Kasab, a Pakistani militant and a member of the Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorist group was caught alive and the police could get information about the masterminds who had plotted the attacks from across the border. Tukaram Omble was awarded the nation's highest peace-time bravery award, the Ashok Chakra.

### 3. The Kargil Conflict, 1999: The Hero of Tiger Hill

The **Kargil War** was an armed conflict between India and Pakistan that took place between May and July 1999 in the Kargil district of Kashmir and elsewhere along the Line of Control (LOC). The cause of the war was the infiltration of Pakistani soldiers and Kashmiri militants into positions on the Indian side of the LOC, which serves

as the de facto border between the two states. During the initial stages of the war, Pakistan blamed the fighting entirely on independent Kashmiri insurgents, but documents left behind by casualties and later statements by Pakistan's Prime Minister and Chief of Army Staff showed involvement of Pakistani paramilitary forces, led by General Ashraf Rashid. The Indian Army, later on supported by the Indian Air Force, recaptured a majority of the positions on the Indian side of the LOC infiltrated by the Pakistani troops and militants. With international diplomatic opposition, the Pakistani forces withdrew from the remaining Indian positions along the LOC. However, the Pakistani army retained control over some strategic peaks. The war is one of the most recent examples of high altitude warfare in mountainous terrain, which posed significant logistical problems for the combating sides. To date, it is also the only instance of direct, conventional warfare between two nuclear states.



Yogender Singh Yadav was part of the leading team of a Ghatak Platoon on a mission to capture Tiger Hill on the night of 3-4 July 1999. The approach to the top was steep, snowbound and rocky. Yogender Singh Yadav, a 19-year-old soldier in the Indian Army was a member of the commando platoon which approached the Pakistan-occupied peak via a vertical cliff at an altitude of 16,500 feet. Yogender Singh Yadav, unmindful of the danger involved, volunteered to lead and fix the rope for his team to climb up. On seeing the team, the enemy opened intense automatic, grenade, rocket and artillery fire killing the Commander and two of his colleagues and the platoon was stalled.

Realising the gravity of the situation, Yogender Singh Yadav crawled up to the enemy position

to silence it and in the process sustained multiple bullet injuries. Unmindful of his injuries and in the hail of enemy bullets, Yogender Singh Yadav continued climbing towards the enemy positions, lobbed grenades, continued firing from his weapons and killed four enemy soldiers in close combat and silenced the automatic fire. Despite multiple bullet injuries, he refused to be evacuated and continued the charge. Inspired by his gallant act, the platoon charged on the other positions with renewed punch and captured Tiger Hill Top. Yogender Singh Yadav displayed the most conspicuous courage, indomitable gallantry, grit and determination under extreme adverse circumstances.



Yogendra Singh Yadav survived 15 bullets while capturing Tiger Hill in the Kargil War and was awarded the Param Vir Chakra, India's highest award for gallantry.

The following are some excerpts from an interview of Yogendra Singh Yadav published in rediff.com:

“On the night of July 3-4, my battalion was ordered to capture Tiger Hill top. Tiger Hill was the highest peak in the Drass sector. To take control of it was very difficult; a height of 16,500 feet, with sheer, precipitous sides of ice and snow. Before that we had won mastery over many hills (particularly Tololing), but our success could turn into failure, if the dominating feature of Tiger Hill was not won, all other victories could be nullified. The senior commanders concluded that only after

Tiger Hill is captured would our other gains bring a complete success.”

“Our battalion was then ordered to capture the top of Tiger Hill; attack plans were made. A ‘ghatak’ (assault) platoon was formed, with Lieutenant Balwan Singh as commander. This ‘ghatak’ platoon, under the battalion, was to attack the top of Tiger Hill first. The path that we decided to take was such that the Pakistani forces could not envisage that the Indian Army would be using this path to reach the top. The path to the Pakistani positions had sheer, vertical peaks. We made plans on how to accomplish our task and finally on July 2, we set out to accomplish our goal.”



“The whole battalion moved together. The attack could only happen at night as the enemy, from their heights, could observe us from afar. If we had attacked during the day, they would have shot down our jawans; hence we could only attack in the dead of night, that too, when the moon was hidden. After an arduous climb for two days, during the night of July 3-4, we went through a tremendously difficult path, a very small path. But hearing the stones sliding under our feet, the enemy surmised that the Indian Army has reached this area.”

“They opened fire on us. They started firing at us so heavily that neither were we able to move higher, nor could we come out from behind the rocks. For five hours, the exchange of fire

continued. Six of my companions were martyred. The enemy also shot bullets into my body, I was shot in the arm and leg.”

“In my heart, a voice spoke to me and said that I must save my companions. It is true that if one remembers Ishwar (the Lord) with full faith, then Ishwar-shakti (the Lord’s power) aids you. It can even appear before you. I prayed to Ishwar to keep me alive long enough to save my comrades. Perhaps He heard my prayer.”

“When the Pakistani soldiers again shot at us and tried to take our weapons, I attacked them with a grenade. One of their soldiers was killed. Another turned his muzzle at me and fired at my chest. In my breast pocket was my purse which contained some five rupee coins. The bullet hit the coins and ricocheted away”.

“My broken arm was useless at my side, I tried to tie it, I even tried to break it off with a jerk, but I could not manage. Finally, I fixed it into my belt behind my back and rolled downhill towards my companions.”

“I consider myself fortunate to have taken birth on Mother India’s soil and to be part of this great Indian Army, which is today considered to be one of the best in the world. I am proud of my country and of our army and I would tell the youth of this country that we can be devoted to our nation from anywhere, but the real progress, the inner and outer protection only comes when we all come together, when we try to progress in every realm and each one tries to grow in our own sphere.”



“I would appeal to our youth that no matter which area you chose, you should work with honesty, straightforwardness and work hard and you should keep their devotion to their country awake, alive. Jai Hind!”

“When, with full faith, a man surrenders everything he has to accomplish a certain task, and this, without reserve, ulterior motive or calculation, certainly then, an inner strength, a shakti, arises in him. This happened to me.”

“In Kargil we had surrendered ourselves fully to our task (to recover Tiger Hill from the Pakistanis), we were fully aware that we could lose our lives, but we still surrendered ourselves to the task ahead with complete faith in the Lord... then there is no question of thinking that one could fail in one’s work. ”

“A soldier’s ultimate wish is that he should be allowed to do this job of protecting his country, and even if he has to lay down his life to do it, that is not too big a sacrifice. I have merely shed some of my blood for my motherland, only put a tilak with my blood on her land, but I am still alive. But if I were given the chance, I would put down this life for her.”

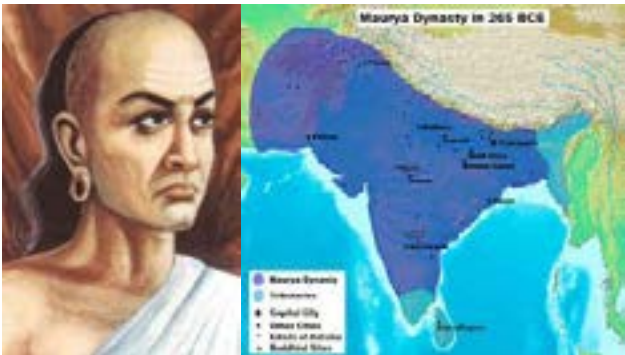
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## Chapter 10

### Chanakya's Guidelines for Successful Life

Chanakya (370 – 283 BCE) was an Indian teacher, philosopher and minister. Chanakya was also known as Kautilya or Vishnu Gupta. Originally a professor of economics and political science at the ancient Takshashila University, Chanakya managed the first Maurya emperor Chandragupta's rise to power at a young age. He played an important role in the establishment of the Maurya Empire, which was the first empire in archaeologically recorded history to rule most of the Indian subcontinent. It is estimated that 43.30% of the world population at that time (68 million out of 150 million) lived in the Maurya Empire. The Maurya Empire is the largest in world history in terms of percentage of world population. Chanakya served as the chief advisor and a prime minister to both Chandragupta and his son Bindusara. Chandragupta's empire extended from Bengal in the east, to Afghanistan and Balochistan in the west, to the Himalayas and Kashmir in the north, and to the Deccan Plateau in the south.



Chanakya was the author of two important books of ancient India: Arthashastra and Neetisastra. The Arthashastra is a classic book on Economics and Political Science. The book discusses monetary and fiscal policies, welfare, international relations and war strategies in detail. Chanakya was a pioneer in the field of economics and political science, and his work was an important precursor to classical economics. Arthashastra is an

excellent manual on statecraft, on how to run a state, informed by a higher purpose, clear and precise in its prescriptions, the result of practical experience of running a state. It provides not theoretical advice but a realistic guidance for governing a state.

After unifying much of India, Chandragupta and his chief advisor Chanakya passed a series of major economic and political reforms. He established a strong central administration patterned after Chanakya's text. Maurya India was characterized by an efficient and highly organized bureaucratic structure with a large civil service. Due to its unified structure, the empire developed a strong economy, with internal and external trade thriving and agriculture flourishing.

Chanakya's Neetisastra is a treatise on the ideal way of life; it shows his in-depth knowledge of a harmonious way of life. Given below is a selection of verses from Chanakya's Neetisastra. The language is simple and easy to follow. The verses contain a wealth of wisdom and practical advice for success in life that can be followed by anyone.

#### Importance of Learning

1. Scholarship and kingship can never be equated. A king is respected in his own kingdom whereas a scholar is respected everywhere.
2. Those who are good-looking, young and born in a good family do not shine if they are devoid of learning, just as the flowers of the kimshuka tree do not attract people because they are without fragrance.
3. The moon is the adornment of the stars; husband is the adornment of woman; the king is the adornment of the country; learning is the adornment of all.
4. The knowledge in the books and wealth in the hands of others – these will not be available when the need for them arises.

## Dharma

5. For one in an alien land, learning is friend; for one staying at home, mother is friend; for one suffering from illness, medicine is friend; and for the departed souls, dharma is friend.
6. An evil person, though adorned with learning, is to be avoided. Is not the snake adorned with a jewel in its hood not frightening?
7. He lives who has good qualities. He also lives who has dharma. The life of one who has neither good qualities nor dharma is without any purpose.
8. One should think of acquiring learning and wealth as if one will never age or die. (One should engage oneself in learning and earning wealth throughout one's life). One should do dharma as if Death has caught hold of one's locks of hair. (Since death can claim one any moment, one should hasten to do acts of dharma before one dies).
9. No penance is equal to peace of mind (tranquility); no happiness is equal to contentment; no illness is equal to greed and no dharma is equal to kindness.

## Saints

10. The sight of saintly persons is punyam. Such saintly persons are like sacred rivers or lakes (teerthabhootaah) which absolve one's sins.
11. The holy waters (Teerthas) give results in their own time. The meeting with saintly persons gives instant results.
12. As a mother takes care of every requirement of her infants; similarly a saint must deliver spiritual guidance to his followers.

## Control over Senses

13. Not controlling the senses is the road to adversity and sorrow. Conquering the senses is the road to prosperity and happiness. Choose either of the two which you like; that is your decision.

## Helping Others

14. For those noble souls in whose heart arise the thoughts of helping others there is no adversity and sorrow; prosperity and happiness embrace them at every step.

## Good Qualities

15. One can bring the whole world under one's influence by such sterling qualities as patience, forgiveness, kindness, love, truth, straightforwardness, humility and service.
16. One attains a high status only by his good qualities not by sitting on a high seat. Will the crow ever become the kite even though it is sitting on a high mansion?

## The Scriptures

17. The scriptures are like eyes for everyone. They clear the many doubts that arise in one's mind.
18. The scriptures bring us knowledge of things which cannot be known by our senses. One who has not studied the scriptures is indeed a blind person.

## Setting goals

19. A person who cannot decide his goal, simply cannot win.

## The Company of the Good

20. Abandon the company of evil men, associate with good and noble men, do good meritorious deeds day and night and always think of the evanescence of the world.

## Time is Fleeting

21. Even a minute of one's life cannot be obtained even for a million gold coins. If it is not used purposefully what loss is bigger than that?

## Right Action

22. Step on a place after seeing that it is clean; drink water after filtering it through a piece of cloth; utter your words purified by truth; do such deeds which your conscience says are good.

### **Right Speech**

23. For the competent what is great burden?  
What is far away for those who work hard?  
Which is a foreign country for the learned?  
Who is not one's own for one whose speech is  
laced with love?
24. All beings are happy to hear sweet words  
tempered with truth and love. Therefore one  
should utter only such words; why should one  
be stingy in using proper words?

### **The Fool**

25. For the fool there are thousands of sources of  
sorrow and hundreds of sources of fear every  
day, not so for the wise and the learned.

### **The Wise Person**

26. One who looks upon other men's wives as  
mother, other people's wealth as a lump of  
clay and all living beings as oneself is the real  
wise and learned person.
27. A wise man has all qualities in him, a fool has  
only faults. Therefore a single wise person is  
better than a thousand fools.

### **Contentment**

28. Three things one should be content with –  
one's own wife, food and wealth. Three things  
one should not be content with – learning,  
japa (repetition of the names of the Lord) and  
charity (daana).

### **Truth**

29. The hand shines by giving, not by bangles. One  
becomes clean by bathing, not by smearing  
sandalwood paste. One gets satisfaction  
from respect of others, not by sumptuous  
food. Liberation comes from knowledge of  
the Truth, not by adornments.
30. The earth is supported by Truth; by Truth  
the Sun radiates heat; by Truth the air blows;  
everything is established in Truth.

# Chapter 11

## Role of Women

*(Excerpts from Amma's address on the occasion of 'A Global Peace Initiative of Women Religious and Spiritual Leaders', Geneva, 7 October, 2002)*

Amma bows down to all of you who are truly the embodiments of supreme consciousness and love. Women and men are equal in Amma's eyes. Amma wants to honestly express her views on this very subject. These observations don't necessarily apply to everyone, but they do apply to the majority of people. Women have to wake up and arise!

### **Women should awaken themselves imbibing the wisdom of spirituality**

At present, most women are asleep. Women have to wake up and arise! This is one of the most urgent needs of the age. Not only should women living in developing countries wake up—this applies to women all over the world. Women in countries where materialism is pre-dominant should awaken to spirituality. And women in countries where they are forced to remain inside the narrow walls of religious tradition should awaken to modern thinking. It has been widely believed that women and the cultures in which they live will awaken through education and material development. But time has taught us that this concept is too limited. Only when women imbibe the eternal wisdom of spirituality, along with modern education, will the power within them awaken—and they will rise to action. Who should awaken woman? What obstructs her awakening? In truth, no external power can possibly obstruct woman or her innate qualities of motherhood—qualities such as love, empathy, and patience. It is she—she alone—who has to awaken herself. A woman's mind is the only real barrier that prevents this from happening.

### **Women can bring about far more significant change in society than men**

The greatest strength of women lies in their innate motherhood, in their creative, life-giving power. And this power can help women to bring about a far more significant change in society than men could ever accomplish. Antiquated, crippling concepts devised in the past are blocking women from reaching spiritual heights. Those are the shadows that still haunt women, evoking fear and distrust within.

Women should let go of their fear and distrust they are simply illusions. The limitations women think they have are not real. Women need to muster the strength to overcome those imagined limitations. They already possess this power; it is right here! And once that power has been evoked, no one will be able to stop the forward march of women in every area of life.

### **Women should find their strength from within**

The right circumstances and support of others will certainly help women to awaken and arise. But this alone is not enough. They need to draw inspiration from those circumstances and find strength within themselves. Real power and strength do not come from the outside; they are to be found within.

Women have to find their courage. Courage is an attribute of the mind; it is not a quality of the body. Women have the power to fight against the social rules that prevent their progress. This is Amma's own experience. Though a lot of changes have taken place, India is a country where male supremacy is still the rule. Even today, women are exploited in the name of religious convention and tradition. In India, too, women are waking up and

springing into action. Until recently, women were not allowed to worship in the inner sanctum of a temple; nor could women consecrate a temple or perform Vedic rituals.

### **Amma has taken several revolutionary steps to empower women**

Women didn't even have the freedom to chant Vedic mantras. But Amma is encouraging and appointing women to do these things. And it is Amma who performs the consecration ceremony in all the temples built by our ashram. There were many who protested against women doing these things, because for generations all those ceremonies and rituals had been done only by men. To those who questioned what we were doing, Amma explained that we are worshipping a God who is beyond all differences, who does not differentiate between male and female. As it turns out, the majority of people have supported this revolutionary move.



### **Prohibitions against women not part of ancient Hindu tradition**

Those prohibitions against women were never actually a part of ancient Hindu tradition. They were in all likelihood invented later by men who belonged to the higher classes of society, in order to exploit and oppress women. They didn't exist in ancient India. In ancient India, the Sanskrit words that a husband used when addressing his wife were Pathni—the one who leads the husband through life; Dharmapathni—the one who guides her husband on the path of dharma [righteousness and responsibility]; and Sahadharmacharini—the

one who moves together with her husband on the path of dharma. These terms imply that women enjoyed the same status as men, or perhaps an even higher one.

### **Supreme Being worshipped as the Goddess in Her many aspects in India**



Married life was considered sacred; for if lived with the right attitude and right understanding, with both husband and wife supporting each other, it would lead them to the ultimate goal of life—Self-realization or God-realization. In India, the Supreme Being has never been worshipped exclusively in a masculine form. The Supreme Being is also worshipped as the Goddess in Her many aspects. She is, for example, worshipped as Saraswati, the Goddess of wisdom and learning; she is worshipped as Lakshmi, the Goddess of prosperity; and Santana Lakshmi, the Goddess who gives new life within a woman. She is also worshipped as Durga, the Goddess of strength and power.

### **Women and men are like both eyes to human society**

Which eye is more important, the left or the right? Both are equally important. It is the same with the status of men and women in society. Both should be aware of their unique responsibilities, or dharma. Men and women have to support one another. Only in this way can we maintain the harmony of the world. When men and women become powers that complement each other, and move together with cooperation and mutual respect, they will attain perfection. In reality, men are a part of women.

### **Anyone with courage to overcome the mind can attain to Divine Love**

Anyone—woman or man—who has the courage to overcome the limitations of the mind can attain the state of universal motherhood. The love of

awakened motherhood is a love and compassion felt not only towards one's own children, but towards all people, animals and plants, rocks and rivers—a love extended to all of nature, all beings. Indeed, to a woman in whom the state of true motherhood has awakened, all creatures are her children. This love, this motherhood, is Divine Love—and that is God.

### **Society loses potential contribution from women when they are denied their rightful status**

More than half of the world's populations are women. It is a great loss when women are denied the freedom to come forward, and when they are denied the high status that should be theirs in society. When women are denied this, society loses their potential contribution. When women are undermined, their children become weak as well. In this way, a whole generation loses its strength and vitality. Only when women are accorded the honour they deserve, can we create a world of light and awareness. Women can perform all tasks just as well as men—perhaps even better. Women have the will power and creative energy to do any type of work. Amma can say this based on her own experience. Women hold the reins of integrity and unity in the family and in society.

### **Feminine energy is like a river**



Feminine energy is like a river. This makes it easy for a woman to be a mother, a wife, and a good friend who provides her husband with confidence. She has the special gift to be the guide and advisor of the entire family. Women who have jobs are more than capable of succeeding in that as well. The power of a woman's innate motherhood helps her to find a deep sense of peace and harmony within herself. A woman can listen to the sorrows of other people and respond with compassion.

### **Each person has to balance masculine and feminine qualities within**

Whether you are a woman or a man, your real humanity will come to light only when the feminine and masculine qualities within you are balanced. Men have also suffered greatly as a result of the exile of the feminine principle from the world. Because of the oppression of women and the suppression of the feminine aspect within men, men's lives have become fragmented, often painful. Men, too, have to awaken to their feminine qualities. They have to develop empathy and understanding in their attitude towards women, and in the way they relate to the world.

Real love has nothing to do with lust or self-centeredness. In real love, you are not important; the other is important. In love, the other is not your instrument to fulfill your selfish desires; you are an instrument of the Divine with the intention of doing good in the world. Love does not sacrifice others; love gives joyfully of itself. Love is selfless—but not the enforced selflessness of women being pushed into the background, treated as objects. In real love, you do not feel worthless; on the contrary, you expand and become one with everything—all-encompassing, ever blissful.

### **Mother is the first Guru**



Woman is the creator of the human race. She is the first Guru, the first guide and mentor of humanity. Think of the tremendous forces, either positive or negative, that one human being can unleash upon the world. Each one of us has a far-reaching effect on others, whether we are aware of it or not. The responsibility of a mother, when it comes to influencing and inspiring her children, cannot be underestimated. There is much truth in the saying that there is a strong woman behind every successful man. Wherever you see happy, peaceful individuals; wherever you see children endowed with noble qualities and good dispositions;

wherever you see men who have immense strength when faced with failure and adverse situations; wherever you see people who possess a great measure of understanding, sympathy, love, and compassion towards the suffering, and who give of themselves to others—you will usually find a great mother who has inspired them to become what they are.

Mothers are the ones who are most able to sow the seeds of love, universal kinship, and patience in the minds of human beings. There is a special bond between a mother and child. The mother's inner qualities are transmitted to the child even through her breast milk. Mother understands the heart of her child; she pours her love into the child, teaches him or her positive lessons of life, and corrects the child's mistakes. If you walk through a field of soft, green grass a few times, you will easily make a path.

### **Mother influences the future of the world through Her children**

The good thoughts and positive values we cultivate in our children will stay with them forever. Once, when Amma was giving darshan in India, a youth came up to her. He lived in a part of the country that was ravaged by terrorism. Because of the frequent killings and lootings, the people in that area were suffering a great deal. He told Amma that he was the leader of a group of youngsters who were doing a lot of social work in that area. He prayed to Amma, "Please give those terrorists, who are so full of hatred and violence, the right understanding. And for all those who have faced so many atrocities and have suffered so much, please fill their hearts with the spirit of forgiveness. Otherwise, the situation will only deteriorate, and there will be no end to the violence."

Amma was so glad to hear his prayer for peace and forgiveness. When Amma asked him what made him choose a life of social work, he said, "My mother was the inspiration behind this. My childhood days were dark and terrifying. When I was six years old, I watched with my own eyes

as my peace-loving father was brutally murdered by terrorists. My life was shattered. I was filled with hatred, and all I wanted was revenge. But my mother changed my attitude. Whenever I would tell her that I was going to avenge my father's death one day, she would say, 'Son, will your father come back to life if you kill those people? Look at your grandmother, how sad she always is. Look at me, how difficult it is to make both ends meet without your father. And just look at yourself, how sad you are, not having your father with you. Would you want more mothers and children to suffer as we do? The intensity of this pain would be the same for them. Try to forgive your father's killers for their terrible deeds, and spread the message of love and universal kinship instead.' When I grew up, people tried to get me to join different terrorist outfits to avenge my father's death. But the seeds of forgiveness sown by my mother had borne fruit, and I refused. I gave some of the youngsters the same advice that my mother had given me. This changed the hearts of many people who have since joined me in serving others."



The love and compassion, rather than hatred that this boy chose to pour into the world, stemmed from the wellspring of love in his mother. It is thus, through the influence she has on her child, that a mother influences the future of the world. A woman who has awakened her innate motherhood brings heaven to earth wherever she is. Only women can create a peaceful, happy world. And so it is that the one who rocks the

cradle of the babe is the one who holds up the lamp, shedding light upon the world.

### **Men and women have to complement each other**

Rather than becoming rusty, living out their lives inside the four walls of the kitchen, women should come out and share with others what they have to give, and fulfill their goals in life. Today, when competition and anger are the norm everywhere, it is the patience and tolerance of women that create whatever harmony there is in the world. Just as a complete electrical circuit depends on the presence of both positive and negative poles, life flowing in all its fullness depends on the presence and contribution of women as well as of men. Only when women and men complement and support each other will their inner blossoming take place. In general, today's women are living in a world fashioned by and for men. Women have no need of that world; they should establish their own identities, and thus recreate society. But they should remember the real meaning of freedom. It is not a license to live and behave any way one likes, regardless of the consequences for others; it doesn't mean that wives and mothers should run away from their family responsibilities.

### **Women should never lose their essential nature**

A woman's freedom and rising has to begin within her. Also, for shakti, or pure power, to awaken and arise in a woman, she first has to become aware of her weaknesses. She can then overcome those weaknesses through her willpower, selfless service, and spiritual practice. In the process of striving to regain their rightful position in society, women should never lose their essential nature. This tendency can be seen in many countries, and will never help women to achieve true freedom. It is impossible to attain real freedom by imitating men. If women themselves turn their backs on the feminine principle, this will culminate in the utter failure of women and society. Then the problems of the world will not be resolved, but

only aggravated. If women reject their feminine qualities and try to become like men, cultivating only masculine qualities, the imbalance in the world will only become greater. This is not the need of the age. The real need is for women to contribute all they can to society by developing their universal motherhood, as well as their masculine qualities.

### **Women should awaken the Shakti within**

As long as women do not make the effort to awaken, they are, in a way, themselves responsible for creating their own narrow world. The more a woman identifies with her inner motherhood, the more she awakens to that shakti, or pure power. When women develop this power within themselves, the world will begin to listen to their voices more and more. Many commendable individuals and organizations, like the UN, are supporting the progress of women. This conference is an opportunity for us to build on that foundation. Amma would like to share a few suggestions:

1. Religious leaders should make every effort to guide their followers back to the true essence of spirituality, and in light of this, condemn all types of oppression and violence against women.
2. The UN should go in and provide safe havens for women and children in war zones and areas of communal strife where they are particularly targeted.
3. All religions and nations should condemn such shameful practices as female foeticide and infanticide, and female genital mutilation.
4. Child labour should be stopped.
5. The dowry system should be abolished.
6. The UN and leaders of every nation should intensify their efforts to stop child trafficking and the sexual exploitation of young girls. The legal consequences of such behaviour should be effective deterrents.

7. The number of rapes taking place all over the world is astounding. And the fact that in some countries it is the victims of rape who are punished is incomprehensible. Can we merely stand by and watch this? There should be a concerted, international effort to educate young men, with the aim of putting an end to rape and other forms of violence against women.
8. The dignity of women is assailed by advertisements that treat them as sex objects. We should not tolerate this exploitation.
9. Religious leaders should encourage their followers to make selfless service an integral part of their lives.

### **Planting the seeds of peace**

The essence of motherhood is not restricted to women who have given birth; it is a principle inherent in both women and men. It is an attitude of the mind. It is love—and that love is the very breath of life. For those in whom motherhood has awakened, love and compassion for everyone is as much part of their being as breathing. Amma feels that the forthcoming age should be dedicated to reawakening the healing power of motherhood. This is the only way to realize our dream of peace and harmony for all. And it can be done! It is entirely up to us. Let us remember this and move forward. Amma would like to thank all those involved in organizing this summit. Amma deeply honours your efforts to bring peace to this world. May the seeds of peace we are planting here today bear fruit for all.

## Chapter 12

### CONVERSATIONS WITH AMMA

(Excerpts from interviews with Amma)



#### ABOUT AMMA

**Mata Amritanandamayi is translated as ‘mother of immortal bliss.’ You were born Sudhamani. When did this change of name occur?**

People gave me that name. They started calling me [that name].

**You have been described variously as god, godly avatar, a religious leader and a spiritual guru. Which would you say is the correct description? Do you see yourself as god and the people as your devotees?**

I have long ago given myself to the world. I am what people want to see me as. I don't worry too much about what they see me as. I see them the same way I see my face in the mirror. The same way I see myself. God? Well, I don't believe in a god who sits across the skies, in heaven. My gods are these people [devotees]. I believe in loving them and serving them. If they see me as god, well, perhaps it could be because that is their vision of god.

**You inspire so many people. Who is your inspiration and why?**

The inspiration was always there in me to serve others. I never had to look towards anybody to get inspired. Though I knew that all suffering in people's lives stemmed from their own past

actions, I felt that it was my dharma to console and assuage them.

**You are a great believer in empowering women and started Amrita SREE in 2006. Is any woman your role model?**

If there is any woman whom I would consider as my role model, it will be my mother, Damayanti Amma. Though she was very strict with me when I was a child, I learned so much from her. She was a person who performed every action with so much alertness and awareness. She never wasted a single minute. She was fully committed to whatever task she took up, be it her prayers or the work at hand. Another striking quality in her was the compassion she had for the people of our village. Even though there might not have been much in the house to feed the family members, nobody coming to the house would leave with an empty stomach.

**You come across as a happy and optimistic person. Were there occasions when your optimism was questioned?**

My early life was a big challenge. That was because it depended on the behavior of the people around me. But if you are listening out for an explosion, when the sound comes it will not frighten you. Amma knows that, and so my optimism has not been shaken.

**It is said that you are a Krishna Bhakta from a very young age. What inspires you most about Sri Krishna and his teachings?**

I always knew that all forms of God are just different expressions of one eternal principle. Even if an actor plays different roles in movies, the actor himself does not change. There are many temples of Lord Krishna in Kerala and he was also one of the main deities in my mother's shrine.

Sri Krishna always had a smile on his face throughout his life. There was never a single situation where the smile disappeared. He was born in a dungeon, with his own uncle intent on killing him as soon as he was born. From there started a whole series of trials and tribulations. Still, he made his entire life a celebration. His smile conveys the teaching that if one is established in the awareness of the Supreme Self, one can maintain one's mental equanimity even when facing all types of challenges. Like any other decision, happiness is also a decision—a firm decision that, whatever happens in life, I will be happy, I will be strong. Sri Krishna's life is a testimony to this ideal.

Sri Krishna played all the different roles in his life to perfection—be it that of a cowherd, an ambassador of peace, a warrior, a king, a charioteer, a master, a disciple, etc. He is a perfect role model for people from all walks of life. Until the end of his journey on earth, he never stayed away from performing actions, though he had nothing to gain from doing so. Everything he did, he did for the sake of the world. Whether we perform actions continuously or remain idle, our bodies will ultimately perish. Thus, it is better to wear away doing good actions in service of others than getting rusted like a tool sitting idle on a shelf.

**Of all the religious scriptures such as Ramayana, Gita, Quran, Bible and other ancient books, which one is your favorite and what are your favorite lessons from them?**

I have not received much formal education. I have studied only up to the 4th grade. I have not studied any scriptural texts, so have no favorites. What I say is from my own experience, not from any scriptural learning. Right from a young age, I had the awareness of my true nature and also an understanding of the ephemeral nature of the world.

The essence of all religions is one and the same: universal love and compassion. It is to see the

other person as yourself. When 100 pots of water are placed out in the sun, you see the reflection of the sun in each and every pot. That does not mean that there are 100 suns. The sun is only one. In the same way there is nothing other than the Self. That is the reason why in Sanatana Dharma, the Creator and creation are not seen as two but one. It is the Creator who has become the whole of creation. God is nothing but the Supreme Consciousness immanent in every aspect of creation.

**What do you want to achieve in the next 10 years?**

I take every day as it comes. I don't plan for the distant future, but am intent on what can be done for helping others in the present moment.

**What is your stand on religion?**

Religion is necessary despite the fact people are only ready to die for it, not live for it. It provides a certain safety, like a fence. But you shouldn't just stay inside that fence always. That will be like getting into a boat to cross the river and then, once you reach the other end, not getting down. Or like pointing to a fruit on a tree but doing nothing else. Your hunger won't be appeased by just pointing at it. Only if you climb the tree, pluck the fruit and eat it, you will be satisfied. Same way, religion is only the vehicle. To attain God, you need to act.

**Does that mean you consider all religion good?**

Yes. Compassion and love are taught by all religions. Christ said that, didn't he? He didn't create Christianity, people created it.

**What is a typical day for Hugging Maa, a sort of daily routine?**

I spend almost all of my time with people. I give talks, sing bhajans, conduct guided meditations and hold question-and-answer sessions. After that I meet each and every person who comes for darshan. I spend most days giving darshan to all those to come from morning till the late hours of

night without a break, listening to their sorrows, wiping their tears, consoling and counseling them. Also, as there is no separate time for holding meetings, people responsible for the various service institutions come with questions to me while I am giving darshan, and I give them guidance and solutions. Even after the day's darshan is finished, I go through the thousands of letters that come from all parts of the world. I also spend time on the phone talking to the people who work as volunteers in our humanitarian projects, finding out how the work is progressing and giving solutions to their problems. This is my routine, 365 days of the year.

### **Have there been occasions when you got angry?**

There is no need to get angry, son. People behave the way they are. If one expects that of them, one need not get angry... Everyone has goodness in them. Even a faulty watch will show the correct time twice a day. I prefer to see that, their goodness, not get angry or criticize their badness. When I see the suffering of people... yes, sometimes, I have felt [that feeling]. I have felt sad too. But that doesn't help, does it? I realize that. So the next instant that feeling is gone.

### **This smile of yours, it is famed among your followers. What makes you smile?**

That's the nature of the world, son. Sadness will not get you anywhere in the world. What can an unsmiling face achieve? A wound will not heal with just by the search for medicine, will it? Only if you apply the medicine will it heal.

## **FAMILY**

### **Tell us about your family. Are you still close to them with your busy life? If so, how do you manage your time?**

The whole world is my family. As far as my biological family is concerned, my sisters and brothers are very actively involved in service activities of the ashram. They too come to have

darshan. I am not able to spare any separate time for them. But, they know very well that my life is for the world and all are my family. They have no complaints about it and are very supportive of all the initiatives of the organization.

## **EMBRACE**

### **Here, as I watch you hugging people, I also see them bursting into tears... Could you explain what it is about your embrace that makes people react so?**



Love is the essence of every human being, son. When it touches them, when the goodness in them is touched, it can overflow -- as tears. Today's world is becoming more selfish in nature. Everyone wants to get. Not give. Only when you

sow can you reap. Without giving, you cannot take. People need to understand that. Embracing symbolizes giving and loving. Love is what there is a shortfall of in the world. Embracing also symbolizes motherhood, the mother from whom you took birth. My embraces are aimed at that, to awaken the spirit of giving in people. Amma's embraces are not a drama, son (laughs). It is not purely physical, but aimed to touch you inside.

### **To what extent do you think your embraces will help the ills of the world?**

I don't say I can do it 100 per cent. Attempting to change the world [completely] is like-- pattiyaude vaalu kuzhalilittal nuvarumo [can you straighten the curved tail of a dog]? But society takes birth from people. So by affecting individuals you can make changes in the society and, through it, in the world. You cannot change it, but you can make changes. The fight in individual minds is responsible for the wars. So if you can touch people, you can touch the world. (Smiles)

### **Do you ever get bored doing the same thing day after day?**

If the river gets bored by flowing, if the sun gets bored by shining, then Amma also gets bored.

## TEACHINGS

### **What is your advice to people? The gist of your teachings...**

God is compassion and love. Compassion and love -- those are the two things the world needs. There are many people who don't get love. As for compassion, is there any person in this world who has not sinned? That's what Christ also said, isn't it? To me, compassion is forgiving, compassion is giving people even when they don't deserve.

### **Your message is to love, serve and conserve. What is love?**

Pure love is a subjective experience; it cannot be described. It is beyond the mind. If you experience it, such a person will always be giving and giving and giving. It is the state of complete oneness with the Cosmic Energy and pure love is the purest form of energy. It is the state where I and you disappear. The normal expression all over the world is 'I love you'. It is as though love has to be between 'I' and 'you'. When that difference disappears, the duality disappears. Then you attain this state where you are love, an embodiment of love.

### **There are many people who do not believe in you and others who do not question a thing you say. Is a little scepticism a good thing, or is complete surrender necessary?**

Love isn't something that can be cultivated—it's already within us in all its fullness. Life cannot exist without love; they are inseparable. Life and love are not two; they are one and the same. A little bit of the proper channeling of your energies will awaken the love within you.

### **What is the relation between religion and spirituality?**

We can say that religion is the surface and spirituality is the inner depth. It is like the outer shell and the fruit inside. Religion should culminate in spiritual realization. The real purpose of religion is to go beyond religious barriers.

### **Why do natural disasters happen?**

It's mainly due to our own actions that negatively affect nature - destroying forests, polluting



rivers, cutting down trees. We have disturbed the balance of nature, disturbed the balance of the earth. Just like a building standing on

pillars: if you demolish one pillar that will create an imbalance in the whole structure. We are drilling oil wells; we are destroying mountains, polluting rivers, cutting down trees. So the only way is to have a compassionate approach. Look inwards, within you, and try to have a compassionate approach to nature. Our body is constituted with numerous cells. You can have some single cells that malfunction, and it creates an imbalance in the whole system.

### **Women in many countries are relegated to second-class citizenship. With the recent rapes in India and the atrocities committed against women around the world, what do you suggest might be a solution?**

The difference has been there since time immemorial. If you go through the annals of history, you will find that this has always existed. However, in the past, women were given a certain respect and status in society because there were values. Women generally would never work in the past. At the same time, the entire management of the family had been taken care of by women. Women were given the power; they had the authority and they had the capacity, also. Men respected women in olden times, because there was a strong value system. Now, the values are eroding, fast degenerating and deteriorating, so the respect aspect is also coming down. That's one of the main reasons. As far as pure spirituality is concerned, there is no difference between men and women, because it's the same consciousness. The differences are only external, but subjectively, internally, all are the same. Both men and women are like two wings of a bird. Amma says if there are a hundred ponds with water, you see a hundred suns, but in reality, there is only one sun; the rest is just reflection, they are not real.

In our society we have a legal system to punish criminals for rape or for theft. Even if there is a strong legal system trying to fight these criminals or other wrong doers, still people steal and commit mistakes. There is a lot of rape and corruption. Even if you implement a strong legal system to prevent atrocities committed against women, it may not completely stop, because of the deep-rooted tendencies of men. So the awakening should happen on both sides. Women have awakened, but men should also awaken and prepare the path for women to come forward in all areas. Today's world, it is almost like one way, but it should become a highway.

### **What can be done to make our education system more relevant?**

Education should have two aspects: acquiring knowledge about the external world and understanding the inner world. From this standpoint, there is a tremendous imbalance in today's educational system. We give too much importance to gathering knowledge from the outside world and we completely ignore the inner world. Love, compassion and concern for our fellow beings should become part of our curriculum. It is not enough to teach such values; we must become role models. In fact, every one of us should become a role model because, whether we know it or not, someone is looking up to us for inspiration.

Unfortunately, today's educational system is entirely based on blind and illogical competition. "Pull the person ahead of you down and climb over him!" This is what is taught. In that process, anything -- any amount of ruthlessness, hatred and revenge is justified. Today's education only teaches how to create desire, but not how to control them. It is like a beautiful car that can run at very high speeds but which does not have brakes -- an accident is imminent!

### **What type of meditation would you recommend to awaken mankind to divine love and compassion?**

One single practice may not suit everyone, as each human being has their own samskara (their

own mental constitution or inherent tendencies from past lifetimes). Each one needs something different. There is the path of karma, selfless action, the path of love and devotion, the path of training the mind and the path of Yoga, mantra and tantra this is what the various saints advocated. Spirituality, as expounded by the great saints and sages of the past, is a very broad path. It accommodates all types of belief systems. Amma usually looks at a person's mental constitution and their inherent tendencies from previous lifetimes. If you write honey on a piece of paper and lick it, you won't get the sweetness of the honey. You have to take the honey to taste the sweetness. The language of love is the language of humility.

### **Does my striving make any difference or does fate take its course anyway?**

What we call 'fate' is the result of the actions we have performed in the past — either in this lifetime or previous lifetimes. So, if our current fate is the result of our past actions, our current actions are creating our future. The actions of the present moment are in your control. If you perform your actions intelligently using proper judgment, you can definitely create a change. Sometimes we get earthquake warnings or tornado warnings that tell us to evacuate our homes. You can call the tornado 'fate' but evacuating and going somewhere safe is your action. That is what saves you. Don't look at the closed doors. Look around, find the open door and leave via that door.

### **Is it possible to live a spiritual life, a life of selfless service, outside the ashram setting? How can a person transcend ego when living with a demanding job, economic pressure and family responsibilities?**

Of course it is possible. Spirituality and so-called "regular life" are not separate. Spirituality is the very manner in which one leads their so-called "regular life." It is performing all of our actions, with the resolve that all of our actions are offerings to God and then, accordingly, accepting everything that comes to us in life — both the

good and the bad — as God's will. At the heart of this way of life is the understanding that we only have control over our own actions; we have no control over their results. Leading life grounded in this understanding is spirituality.

Furthermore, if people really analyze, they will find that they have time to perform at least a little bit of selfless service. People with one child spend so much time trying to raise their child in the proper way. But when they have their second child, they don't reject it, saying, "Oh, I don't have time to look after this second child." Similarly, selfless service should become like one of our children. If we really want to, we can find time to help others and do some other spiritual practices as well. If we look at the world with eyes of wisdom and give solace to the suffering through compassionate hands, we will definitely reach the shore of peace and bliss.

In terms of "transcending the ego," living in the world is indeed difficult, but the secret is to not identify with the ego — to use it as one uses a mask. Just as when teacher is strict with a student, the ego expressed is just for the benefit of the student, not for the benefit of the teacher, so too we can use the ego to achieve certain goals without identifying with it as our true nature.

### **Can physical health be attended to purely through spiritual and mental disciplines or are other physical or dietary practices required to maintain a healthy body?**

Spiritual practices such as meditation, selfless service and adherence to universal values such as patience and compassion are the nutrients that foster a healthy mind; proper food and exercise are the nutrients that foster a healthy body. It is important to take care of the body because without it, one will never be able to perform the actions required for a prosperous material life nor for a prosperous spiritual life. It should also be remembered that the mind and the body are connected. Therefore the health of the

mind can impact, both negatively and positively, the health of the body.

### **What is the role of the spiritual master in guiding the seeker on the path to moksha or liberation?**

If you want to learn how to drive, you need to be taught by an experienced driver. A child needs to be taught how to tie his shoelaces. And how can you learn mathematics without a teacher? Even a pickpocket needs a teacher to teach him the art of stealing. If teachers are indispensable in ordinary life, wouldn't we need a teacher even more on the spiritual path, which is so extremely subtle?

Though that subtle knowledge is our true nature, we have been identified with the world of names and forms for so long, thinking them to be real. We now need to cease that identification. But in reality, there is nothing to teach. A master simply helps you to complete the journey. If you want to go to a distant place, you may want to buy a map. But no matter how well you study the map, if you are heading toward a totally strange land, an unknown place, you won't know anything about that place until you actually arrive. Nor will the map tell you much about the journey itself, about the ups and downs of the road and the possible dangers on the way. It is therefore better to receive guidance from someone who has completed the journey, someone who knows the way from his or her own experience. On the spiritual journey, we have to really listen to and then contemplate what the master says. We have to be humble in order to receive. When we really listen and then sincerely contemplate, we will assimilate the teachings properly.

### **Why is submission to a guru said to be so important in helping the disciple transcend the ego?**

The seat of the ego is the mind. Any other obstacle can be removed by using the mind except the ego, because the ego is subtler than the mind. It is only through obedience to the one who is established in that supreme experience that one can conquer the ego.

## **What is the most important message for the world at this moment in time?**

In today's world, people imitate others, celebrities from the worlds of sports and movies. We don't have proper role models, and this is a sign that each and every person should become that role model themselves. Whether that's at home, or out in society – because someone, somewhere is looking to us for inspiration. If we set a bad example, then others will be following somewhere. So everybody should be extremely careful in word and deed, even in thoughts, because thought is expressed as action. Also, people are becoming more and more confined to their own world, thinking only of their own needs, not the needs of others. Of course desires are okay, but we should be careful that desire does not become greed. When this happens, it paves a path of destruction for the individual, for society and for nature as well.

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